PAVEL BAZHOV

THE MALACHITE CASKET

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By

PAVEL BAZHOV

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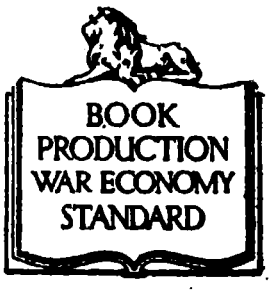

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORISED ECONOMY STANDARDS

IN PLACE OF FOREWORD

THE WATCH-HOUSE ON DUMNA MOUNTAIN

WHEN I WAS A SMALL BOY I LIVED AT POLYEVSKY FOR THREE YEARS, at the Smelting Works there. That was about fifty years ago—1892 to 1895. We lived in a house on the other side of the river, almost at the foot of Dumna Mountain—a tiny little house built on a bed of slag.

It was a wild, desolate sort of locality. The part of the town where the towering buildings of the Chrysolite Works and the Workers' Settlement now stand was then nothing but a slightly raised field, the site of the old Gumyoshevsky mine. Behind the mine and the workers' houses stretched an endless belt of dark blue pine-forest.

Not far from our house was the Works' wood-yard. To protect this yard a watch-house with a bell had been erected on Dumna Mountain. There was something mysterious about the sound of the bell in the evenings and our youthful imagination connected it and the watch-house with all sorts of 'terrible happenings.'

"Let's go up the mountain and listen to the story-telling," one of my first friends at Polyevsky suggested to me.

"Story-telling? . . . What do you think I am—a baby?"

"Come on! Grandpa Slishko is on duty to-day. He tells all sorts of wonderful stories. About Dyevka Azovka, about Poloz, about all the riches of the earth. . . ."

In 1892 the era of the copper-smelting industry was drawing to its close at Polyevsky. The refineries still handled smeltings from the Seversky works, but even these were closed down for long periods. As a result the Polyevsky workers had taken to prospecting for gold and chrysolites and naturally this change of occupation affected their whole mode of life.

I had often heard the names of Azovka and Poloz, in connection with stories about fabulous underground riches. They had always seemed somehow fanciful and unreal, but I thought it would be interesting to hear about them again. I went up the mountain with my friend and from that day onwards became one of Grandpa Slishko's keenest listeners. I even used to run away from our games in the evenings so as not to miss the times when he was on duty.

He was called Vasily Alexeyevich Khmelinin, but that was only his official name on the factory and district registers. To the children he was 'Grandpa Slishko'. The grown-ups had two other names for him: Stakanchik and Protcha—both of which the old man answered to.

The reason he was called Stakanchik* is not hard to guess. The other two nicknames had their origin in two favourite expressions of his: *Slish'ko*† and *Protcha*†. It caused no surprise when someone called out to him:

"Stakanchik! Do you know the sands at Farnyevka?"

"But of course."

"Will you come there with me, then? I'll stand you a drink if you will. Maybe two drinks. I want to have a talk with you. . . ."

"No reason why not. Why shouldn't we have a talk. . . . Good will on your side, no ill will on ours. What I know, that I'll show."

Even the Works' official—'the pig-dog pay-clerk,' as the workers called him—called out to him on the monthly pay-day:

"Hi, Protcha, come and rake in your winnings. Sign your cross and pick up your five roubles. That mountain of yours hasn't run away from you then?"

"A mountain is not a dog, Ivan Andreich; it does not roam about aimlessly."

The other men waiting to be paid started to laugh. The cashier pretended not to notice the joke at his expense and continued to banter him:

"So you tell stories up there! All the work you have to do is to talk, eh?"

"To each according to his powers, Ivan Andreich. Some people can't talk; they can only bark."

More laughter. This time the cashier lost his temper openly:

"You'd better look out!"

"That's what I'm paid to do. We don't fling ourselves at people at the watch-house; we just give them a good look-over. You don't pay us five roubles for nothing, you know."

"Off with you! You're holding me up."

"That's a true word you've spoken."

When the old man had gone, there were murmurs of approval from the crowd:

"Told the pig-dog off proper, he did."

"Knowing old chap. Hold his own with anyone. You can't catch him out!"

That was Khmelinin's reputation among the grown-ups: a knowing old man with a ready wit, who 'knew every inch of our sands.' The children knew him as a highly entertaining story-teller. The old man loved children and was always very good to them.

He lived almost alone. His 'old woman', who was ten years younger than he, was hardly ever at home. She went among the people doing odd jobs as housekeeper or midwife.

The old man was still hale and hearty; he scuttled about in a lively way in his lined felt boots; and there was still a youthful vigour in the

* Stakan is Russian for glass, implying that the old man was fond of his drink.

† "Slishko" means "listen then", which in the translation has been rendered: "Look you!" "Protcha" means "and so on."

way he jutted out the tuft of his grey beard; but for all that you could see he had reached the twilight of his years. Age had shrivelled him up, hunched his shoulders and diminished his never very tall stature. Yet even Age had not been able to extinguish the merry sparkle in his eyes. His disproportionately broad shoulders and long arms reminded you that he must once have been a man of considerable strength.

The clock above the weir struck eight. The watch-house clock followed suit. Third watch on Dumna Mountain.

Grandpa Slishko would already have mounted the slightly raised platform and be waiting for the last strokes of the clock to die away.

Then he would ring his bell rhythmically and proclaim:

"Listen all! Our voice is soft but clear and we do not sleep . . ."

After ringing the bell, he would climb slowly down from the platform, seat himself on the steps of the watch-house and begin filling his pipe.

This was the most peaceful hour of the day, when Grandpa would tell his stories. But if you asked him to tell you a story he always corrected you:

"A 'story' you say. Stories, friend, are all about the priest and his wife. You're not old enough to hear them. And as for 'the Speckled Hen that laid the Golden Egg,' 'the Fox and the Cock' and all the rest of it—the kind old women tell to children, you're too old for them, eh? And besides I don't know any. I did know some but I've forgotten them all. Stories about Olden Times—those are the ones I remember. I heard a lot of them from our old people when I was little, and later on, too. I've knocked about a bit, look you. I've been down in the ditch and I've sat up on the Golden Mountain. I'm getting on for eighty now. And that's not as simple as striking eight on a bell, look you! I've used my eyes and my ears in my lifetime. These tales of mine are not just stories; they are about real happenings, too. 'Tis not everyone who can tell you such things. There's an art in it. And yet you talk to me about 'stories'!"

"Do you think it's true about the Magic Power?"

"But why not?"

"But at school they told us. . . ."

"Never mind about school. You learn your lessons and don't try to judge old men. Perhaps old men feel happier thinking 'tis true. You listen to whatever you're told. When you grow up, then will be the time to figure out what was true and what was untrue. Understand, son?"

The old man often gave the impression in his stories that he himself had actually seen and heard the things he was telling about. When he was speaking about places that were visible from the mountain he would point them out:

"That's where he collapsed, over there. . . ."

"The steepest slope was over by that drum there. 'Tis there they held their council and Stepan says . . ."

"You can't see it now, but over there, just to the right of those pines, was a little hill. Snake Hill it was called. That's where Danilo went."

If you happened to hear the same story a second or third time, you could hardly fail to notice that the old man did not always use the same words. Sometimes he changed the sequence of a story and sometimes he altered all sorts of details.

Now and again one of his audience could not refrain from calling out:

"But Grandpa, the other time you didn't tell us about that . . . ."

"Well, what if I didn't? I must have forgotten about it. But that is how it was, look you. You can be sure of that."

The old man knew the life of a miner and prospector inside out. Every aspect of it was familiar to him as a matter of course—even the sudden, unexpected lucky strikes. He used to introduce into his stories many things that he had actually seen and experienced, and these were quite authentic. He also stoutly maintained the authenticity of the stories he had heard from the mouths of his own people.

When talking about the ancient road, for example, he would point out the place where it used to run, at the foot of Azovka Mountain, although there was no trace of it to be seen now. According to historical documents, such a road really did exist at one time, and was used by the Waywodes as a route frum Ufa to Turinsk. Fugitives too, probably found this road the quickest route to Siberia. So it is not surprising that the names of Azov Mountain and the ancient road are closely connected in the stories with the Free People who lived there, fell upon Tsarist detachments and merchants' caravans, and hid their booty in Azov Mountain.

Thus the Gumyoshevsky mine was a place where three different kinds of stories were to be found: about the Ancients, about the riches of the earth, and about buried treasure.

Not unnaturally, stories of one kind became mixed up with those of another. The Ancients acquired some of the characteristics of the Free People and vice-versa. The beautiful woman, the wife of an attaman or the girl with legal rights over the territory was transformed into 'The Stone Girl,' 'The Malachite Girl' or 'The Mistress of the Mountain.'

The 'Mistress of the Mountain' changes from an impartial guardian of the riches of the earth into a partisan who helps some by guiding them and facilitating their access to those riches, and diverts, deludes or ruins others.

The 'Mistress' is hostile to the gentry, to the Government officials and to the various underlings of the gentry; she only helps the brave, resolute, freedom-loving workers, who are to some extent akin to the 'Free People.' But the 'Mistress' is not content with playing the rôle of assistant, collaborator, and guardian of the Treasure. She has not only the Treasure but the entire riches of the earth at her disposal and she can herself decide whether they are to be exploited or not.

She can take the riches away or assemble them all together just as she wishes.

The 'Mistress of the Mountain' becomes the personification of the strength, beauty and richness of the underground treasures which only reveal themselves completely to those who toil.

The significance of the lizards, which appear in the stories as a sort of incarnation of the 'Mistress,' is obvious to anyone who has ever seen copper ore being dug out or broken up. It bears a striking resemblance to lizards both in colour and in form. The liveliness and sportiveness of the lizard are also reflected in the characteristics of the 'Mistress of the Mountain.' She is always represented as being very agile, quick in decision, and a great one for pranks and practical jokes, who not only delights in playing tricks on those she dislikes but often places those whom she does like in awkward situations.

The 'Mistress of the Mountain' has in her service numerous lizards and the 'Brown Cat' which lives underground, but keeps close to the surface and sometimes sticks up its fiery ears. Dyevka Azovka is also subordinate to some extent to the guardian of the Treasure.

In the 'most precious spot,' in the place where the 'greatest treasure' is to be found, it is inevitable that the image of the snake should appear. Snakes and gold have always been closely associated. 'Snakes' nests,' 'snake places' were considered a sure sign that gold was present. Even in books which the 18th Century deemed scientific, this was not refuted. In 1760, for example, there appeared: *A comprehensive Manual of Mining Affairs in four parts . . . . With numerous illustrations. . . . By the President of the Court of Mines and Chief Judge of the Specie Chancery, Ivan Shlyatter.* This book, 294 large-format pages in length, with 35 pages of illustrations, was dedicated to the President of the Academy of Science, P. I. Shuvalov, and was one of the standard works of its day. And yet even in this 'standard work' we read: "Although some consider the belief that snakes, lizards and similar reptiles are always to be found in rich ore localities to be unfounded, the example of the Kolivanovoskresensky mine shows that it cannot altogether be refuted; for the large number of snakes and similar reptiles found on a mountain there which is rich in gold and silver fields (and which have earned it the name Snake Mountain) shows that such reptiles are more numerous in places where gold and silver are to be found."

Gold nuggets of considerable weight are often found in the sands of the Polyevsky region. To some extent this was a matter of chance, but the prospectors' many years of practical experience inevitably contributed to such lucky strikes. The best gold seams usually fell to those who were most experienced. This was natural enough. . . .

"He knows these parts. Been through all the sands. Can see from the first spadeful if there's anything there."

"Your mining expert follows his map, but he goes by the foam and the pebbles. He just picks a spot, sticks in his spade, and sure enough

that's the place. That's all the map he needs. But you can be sure he'll strike the right place. He'll not make any mistake!"

"He only has to scratch the old earth and he can read it like a book."

Such simple and essentially rational explanations often alternated with observations of another kind:

"He knows a magic word."

"He has secret helpers he doesn't tell us about."

"The other day at the pub he told us he had seen Poloz's traces. That's why he finds gold!"

"Their grandfather knew all there was to know. He must have told them his secret."

When a completely inexperienced prospector happened to make a rich strike the talk about magic words, magic tokens and secret helpers redoubled:

"No doubt of it. He had seen the Blue Flames."

"He was sitting there and he saw some copperheads frolicking round a stone. A whole bunch of them. They were all writhing about and dipping their heads underneath each other. He marked where the stone was and dug there and got up a nugget which weighed three pounds."

"We know what kind of copperheads they were!"

"He found a Guidestone, they say. Left there by the Ancients. And he went and dug there and dug up his fortune."

Such were the manifestations of a 'magic power' by whose agency the illiterate worker and prospector of those days tried to explain many things that he could not understand.

If a seam gave out—Poloz the Great Snake had removed it. If a grain of gold was found in a piece of rock—the snake had been through, leaving a trail behind. If someone found an unusually large or beautiful piece of malachite, the 'Mistress of the Mountain' must have helped him. And so on.

It may be presumed that the stories of a 'magic power' had another significance besides.

In the days of serfdom the mine officials were no more literate than the workers. They too believed in the existence of 'magic powers,' and the workers were sometimes able to take refuge behind these powers. For instance, it is mentioned in the stories that miners could not be flogged in the mines. The reason for this was that the officials were frightened of using violence within the domain of the 'Mistress.' An overseer who infringed this custom would be punished severely. Of course the death of an overseer and the circumstances leading up to it, might allow of quite a different explanation. It may have been that the miners plotted together and trampled the overseer into the mud themselves, but all the credit for it was given to the 'Mistress.' There is an instance of this sort of thing in the sixth of these stories, where we are told how a worker who has been bound in chains disappears from the mine and reappears at the Works, freezes up the copper-smelting furnaces and then disappears again.

This is attributed to the miraculous connivance of the 'Mistress,' but it is easy to think of another explanation.

'Giving all the credit to the Mistress' was useful to the workers, both as a means of diverting punishment from themselves, and in order to reinforce the illiterate official's superstitious dread of the 'magic power.'

In their own way, Khmelinin's stories can thus be regarded as documents of social-historical value. Not only is the arduous life of the miners of those days portrayed in them, but also their naïve conception of 'earthly miracles' and their dreams of other conditions of life—what sort of conditions not even the narrator himself could say, but conditions that would be different from those under which his own life had been spent.

The stories were never written down during V. A. Khmelinin's life-time. The men at the works—'experienced technicians' or 'smart fellows with good handwriting'—could not of course appreciate the stories at their true worth; and those who were higher up in the social scale, though barely literate, looked down contemptuously on 'some stories or other by some old watchman-fellow.'

These 'important personages' did not realize that the illiterate old watchman-fellow had a wonderfully deep understanding of the life of the mine-workers and, like a true artist, knew how to reproduce their life and the whole history of the district with an imagery that was far more vivid and realistic than anything to be found in the works of the official historians.

Reproduced from memory—and almost half a century later at that—Khmelinin's stories have naturally lost a good deal of their value as documents of folk-lore. And in the process of reproduction it is inevitable that traces of other stories should have crept into them.

But the interest and attention which they have aroused, even in this form, is proof of the poetic significance, forcefulness and fascination of the stories as told by Grandpa Slishko at the watch-house on Dumna Mountain.

BELOVED NAME

IT HAPPENED LONG, LONG AGO, IN THE DAYS WHEN THE ANCIENTS LIVED here, at the place where they're now finding gold in the sand.

Gold . . . chrysolites . . . copper. . . . The place was covered with 'em. You could just help yourself. But it all meant nothing to the Ancients, look you. What use were they to them? Their children could play with the chrysolites, but there was nothing they could do with the gold. Just yellow grains and sand—and what could you do with that? To be sure, there were quite big nuggets, some of them weighing several pounds, lying in heaps in the middle of the road; but nobody ever bothered to pick them up. If they got in their way they'd kick them aside—that's all they cared for them.

But they did have one use for them, look you. They took the nuggets with them when they went hunting. They were small and heavy, just right for throwing, look you; they could stun quite big animals with them. Easy, it was.

And that's why we often find nuggets to-day in places where there ought not by rights to be any gold at all. The Ancients had thrown them wherever they happened to be hunting.

As for copper, they dug up a bit of that and made axes and other weapons out of it, and cooking ladles and all sorts of domestic implements. The Gumyoshevsky mine comes down to us from them. But naturally they had no pits like we have to-day; they just dug up the ore that was nearest the surface.

They hunted animals and caught birds and fish—that's how they lived. And there were swarms of wild bees everywhere; you could have as much honey as you wanted. But corn now, that was something they hadn't even a name for. And as for keeping cattle—horses and sheep and cows and all that—they had no notion of such a thing.

They weren't Russians and they weren't Tatars; what kind of folk they belonged to, what their creed and customs were, nobody knows. They lived up in the forest. In a word, they were the Ancients.

They had no houses or buildings—no bath-houses or cellars or anything of that kind. They lived in the mountains. In Dumna Mountain there's a big cave. There was an entrance to it from the river. Nowadays you can't see it, it has got blocked up with slag; but it was seventy feet high. But the biggest cave of all was the one in Azov mountain. Enormous, it was; it went right under the mountain. You can still see the entrance to-day, but it's got a bit blocked up. Well, there's a mystery about this cave, and that is the story I'm going to tell you.

And so the Ancients lived peacefully here doing no harm to anyone. But after a while other races started to come here. First the Tatars came riding through. They beat out a track from the foot of Azov Mountain to the foot of Dumna Mountain. It ran from South to

North, as straight as an arrow. Nowadays there's nothing to be seen of it, but some of the old folk round here say their grandparents saw it. 'Twas a big broad track, look you, as broad as one of our roads, only without any ditches.

So these Tatars came and came and plied their trade backwards and forwards. But as for the gold, nothing happened to that. Either the Tatars didn't know what it was or they didn't know 'twas there.

At first the Ancients hid themselves underground, but when they saw that no one wanted to harm them, they came out and went on living quietly as before, catching birds and fish and killing animals with their copper axes and the nuggets.

Then one day swarms of Tatars appeared, thousands and thousands of them, all streaming towards the north. Swarm after swarm of them went by, all armed with swords and spears, as if for battle.

But after a little while they all came swarming back again, running so fast the ground was black with them. For Ermak and his Cossacks had come to Siberia and were driving all the Tatars out. And when other Tatars came to their help, they too got the fright of their lives. You see, the Tatars had never seen firearms before and Ermak's guns scared 'em out of their wits.

These Cossacks, look you, used to be free men but by the time they came to Siberia they had already been sold. They were sold to merchants and as for the Tsar, he just gave them away as presents. And as for their chief, look you, this Ermak, the Tsar sent him his own silver shirt. And Ermak never took that shirt off his back, so proud was he of it, look you. And in that shirt, in the Tsar's gift, he was drowned.

No sooner was Ermak dead than his people were up to every kind of mischief. All sorts of riffraff joined the Cossacks. And whoever was of a mind to do it set himself up to play the master. They grabbed whatever they wanted; seized people by the throat; robbed, and took from one and gave to another; carried off women and young girls and children and all the rest of it. In a word, it was a time of trouble, a time of such lawlessness as had never been known before.

One of these lawless bands appeared in these parts. There were not very many of them and they came on foot, but their chief, look you, turned out to be a master-bandit.

These men spotted the gold at once; they made such a rush for it they nearly murdered each other in their eagerness to grab it. But after a while they thought things over, and they saw that there was a great deal of gold here, much more than they could carry away. So what were they to do? And they looked round to see if there were any villages or settlements nearby where they could get some horses; and thus they came upon the Ancients.

"Who are these people?" they said at once. "What tribe are they? To what Tsar do they pay tribute?"

And little by little they began to encroach on the Ancients' land.

The Ancients tried to reason with them by signs: "We don't want anything of yours," they tried to say, "and nothing of ours interferes with you, so please go your ways." But the Cossacks tried to frighten them and fired their guns at them. Whereupon the Ancients took fright and ran up into the mountains. The Cossacks ran after them and thought they had conquered them. But not on your life! The Ancients, look you, were in truth very brave. 'Twas only at first they were frightened. They thought the shooting was fire from heaven and that was why they fled. But they were very strong—much stronger than we Russians are to-day—and half as tall again. They ran away to their caves in the mountain and when the Cossacks came after them, they hurled their golden stones at them and killed nearly all of them. Two or three managed to escape, but the Ancients did not think to pursue them. They were rid of them and that was all that mattered. Let them go where they would, provided only they didn't come their way again.

The Ancients were very astonished to see that the men they had killed were all carrying great quantities of the yellow stone. They could not understand their carrying such heavy weights about with them. They had no idea what the stones meant to the Cossacks and imagined they were just using them as weapons after their own fashion. They examined the dead men's guns and it happened that one of them was still loaded. One of the Ancients was turning this gun over and over and fingering it, when it went off. It gave them all a great fright and wounded the man slightly but it didn't kill anyone. So now the Ancients knew 'twas not fire from Heaven, and they tried to find out how to fire the guns. They examined the dead men very carefully and sniffed them and pawed them all over. They found some gunpowder and some bits of lead. But what these were used for, they could not tell.

Meanwhile the three who had escaped went back to their chief and told him what had happened to them. "Some strange people fell upon us," they said, "and killed nearly all of us. Only we three managed to get away."

The chief—maybe he was drunk at the time—said: "No matter." It was a time of fighting, look you, the time of the subjugation of Siberia, and such things were often happening. People were always getting killed. And that seemed to be the end of the matter.

But the Cossacks had not told their chief anything about the gold. They said to themselves: "So be it then; one of these days we'll go back there and console ourselves." But you know what gold is. It's heavy but you can't keep it hidden; it will out. For look you, the first thing you have to do is to exchange it for money. And here the Cossacks were in a bit of a fix. They had only taken the biggest nuggets, and how could they show people those? There would at once be questions as to where they had got them from.

However they found a way out. They broke the nuggets up into little pieces and took them to the merchants. And they even hid what

they were doing from each other. You know what gold does to people. One would go to one merchant, a second to another and a third to yet a third. In this way they did the round of all the merchants.

The merchants, of course, were only too delighted. They paid money for the gold and took note of things.

But now that the Cossacks had money in place of the gold, what could they do with it? They bought themselves clothes of the very finest and then gave themselves up to drinking and debauching; they were always in the taverns treating everyone who came in.

Well, the other Cossacks soon grew suspicious. Where had these fellows got all their money from? They began to ask questions, and drunkards are not good at keeping secrets. . . . They soon found out all about it, and another band collected together to go out after the gold. Not all the Cossacks were the same, of course. There was one of them—I don't know his name—who came from Solikamsk. He'd joined them in the hope of finding a better life but when he saw they did nothing but steal and drink, the Cossacks' way of life disgusted him.

And when this Solikamsk man heard what they were planning to do, he stood up and harangued them:

"I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourselves. It used to be the merchants and the boyars you fleeced. But what are you doing now? Tearing the roofs off the people's houses here so as to make profit for the merchants! Isn't that so?"

Naturally this kind of snuff didn't suit their noses, and, being armed, they all whipped out their swords and went for him. Now the Solikamsk man was a brave, agile young fellow and he managed to beat them off, but in so doing he was badly wounded.

He crept away into the forest, so that they shouldn't find him; for people were frightened of the forest and no one would go in search of him there.

The Cossacks rushed up and down, raging and roaring, and the wounded man hid in the forest and said to himself: "What shall I do next? If I go back to the camp, they'll probably shoot me or hang me because of the things I said." And in the end he decided: "I will go and warn the people they're planning to rob."

He knew the road they meant to take, but it was a long way to where the Ancients lived. He had no food with him, and he grew weaker and thinner as he went, and his wounds hurt him cruelly. At times he was hard put to it to stand, and he could keep on only by dragging himself forward again. Finally, when he reached the foot of Azov Mountain over there, he collapsed altogether.

The Ancients saw a strange man lying there, all covered with blood and with a gun in his hand. The first to run up and take a look at him were the women. The women, as you know, are the most soft hearted folk in every race and like to tend the wounded.

Now among these women was a girl, the daughter of one of their elders. She was a fine, bold upstanding girl, nimble and strong, look

you, and more than a match for many a boy. And she was more beautiful than words can tell. Her eyes were like glowing coals, her cheeks like rose petals, and her long plaited hair reached right down to her ankles; everything about her was perfection. A more beautiful girl you could not imagine. She was a splendid dancer, too, and when she sang a song it was all trills. In short, she was a lovely girl altogether. There was only one thing wrong with her: she was too tall. Indeed, truth to tell, she was a regular giantess. And she was just of marriageable age. In her eighteenth year, she was. Just ripe for marriage they were then.

Well, this girl, now, she took a fancy to the stranger; and he too, in his Russian way, was a fine strapping fellow: clean and fresh and curly-haired and wide eyed. He took her fancy right away and while the other women were still 'ah'-ing and 'oh'-ing, she picked him up in her arms and carried him to the cave, and there she looked after him and washed and bandaged his wounds. Her father and mother did not gainsay her and the neighbours, too, said nothing and helped her look after him and fetched and carried for her. The women, look you, were sorry for the wounded man, and the men were thinking: "Maybe he'll show us how to fire the guns."

So when the wounded man came to his senses he found he was among a crowd of strange, unknown people. They were taller than his own people and they could not understand the Tatar tongue. He himself knew a few words of this tongue and had relied on them to make himself understood when he came to these parts. However, there was nothing to be done about it, so he had to learn their names for things by means of signs. And in this way, look you, he began to pick up their speech.

This girl, now, she never left his side; she fairly clung to him. And naturally he, being a young fellow, felt himself drawn towards her.

But he was slow to recover his health. The main reason for this was that the Ancients had no such thing as bread. The girl brought him all sorts of delicate dishes, meat and fish and brimming goblets of mead, but he couldn't bear the sight of them. All he wanted was a piece of barley bread. And he begged and implored her to give him some. But she did not understand what bread was. She even cried, the poor girl.

A Russian can't get along without bread: that is well known. So how could he recover? Still, after a while he was able to get about a bit and he slowly picked up some of their language; but as for the girl, now, she picked up his Russian in a flash. She was a clever one, look you, and, besides that, she was no ordinary girl: she had the Magic Power in her.

And so the Solikamsk man started walking again and he made the round of the whole place and showed them how to fire the guns and explained everything to them.

"These yellow stones," he says, "and this green glass of yours are the worst possible things for you. If the merchants once get a sniff

at them, they'll never leave you in peace again. And if it gets to the Tsar's ears your life won't be worth anything."

"Now this is what you must do," he says. "All these stones, these nuggets as they call them, you must hide somewhere. Hide them in Azov Mountain; and bury all the chrysolites there too. And the yellow gold dust and the smaller stones must be dug into the ground. You must dig up the black earth, so that the grass will grow over them. And until you have done all this, you must not let any strangers come near. If any do come, you must kill them: kill them like beasts.

"And to prevent anyone coming upon you unawares," he says, "you must post trusty sentries on Dumna Mountain and Azov Mountain. Let them watch the roads and see that nobody comes. And as soon as they see strangers approaching, they must give a signal by lighting fires. When they do this you must rise as one man and fall upon the strangers. For as you are placed they are more dangerous to you than any wild beast."

The girl explained all this to her own people, and they saw that the stranger wanted to help them and did as he advised. They posted sentries as he had told them, and carried the gold and the chrysolites up into Azov Mountain. They stacked the gold in great piles, wonderful they were to see, and shovelled the chrysolites together in heaps like coal. Then they dug the fragments and the gold dust into the ground.

And during this time they did not allow any strangers to come near.

And if the sentries on Azov or Dumna Mountain saw anyone approaching, the signal was at once given—by lighting fires, that's to say—and they all rushed out to wherever it was and fell upon the intruders and wiped them out. Wiped them out and buried them. They were no longer afraid of guns.

But gold is to men what treacle is to flies. The more of 'em it destroys the more they run after it. And so it was here. Many perished but still more came in their place. And this meant that rumours about the gold had spread far and wide. Someone, it seems, must have told the Tsar about it. And things became bad, very bad indeed. They brought up cannon and fired from all sides. The forest held no terrors for them, for they made paths and roads through it.

The Ancients saw that they were hard pressed and lacked the forces to resist. So they went to the wounded man and asked him what they should do. He was up on Dumna Mountain at this time. The girl had taken him there for the sake of the air, for he was still very weak from his wounds. Azov Mountain was like a dense forest but there was always a breeze blowing on the rocks of Dumna Mountain, so the girl had taken him up there for his good. Her one thought was to look after him.

They held council up there for three days. That is why the mountain is called Dumna. Before that it had some other name. They

talked it over and decided to move to another place where there was no gold but plenty of animals, birds and fish; and the Solikamsk man advised them where to go. When this had been settled they made ready for the road; and they wanted to take the man who had helped them so much with them. But he did not wish it.

"I feel that my death is near," he said; "and besides, I cannot leave here." But why he could not, he did not say.

And then the girl said:

"I am going to stay here too."

Her mother and her sisters raged, her father threatened her and her brothers pleaded with her:

"What are you thinking of, sister, what are you thinking of? Why, you have your whole life before you."

But she stood her ground and said:

"It is my fate. I will not leave my Beloved."

And there was no gainsaying her. A rock of a girl she was!

Her mind was made up and that was that. You wouldn't find a girl like that in our day. Her parents saw that there was nothing to be done, so they took their leave of her as was fitting, thinking to themselves; well, in any case her life is ruined; some girls are more grief-stricken when their betrothed happens to die than if they had been widowed; the grief of it remains with them all their lives.

So they all went away, leaving these two alone on Azov Mountain. And people poured in on every side, and dug up the gold and fought over it.

The wounded man grew weaker and weaker. One day he said to his betrothed:

"Farewell, my dearest girl! For I know that Fate will not allow us to live together and love each other and raise up children."

She, of course, wept bitterly as women do, and tried to persuade him by every means in her power:

"Do not fear, my dearest. I will cure you and we will live on somehow or other."

But he said again:

"No, my dearest, already I am leaving this world. Not even bread could cure me now. I feel that my time is near. And besides we are not of a pair, you and I. You are so tall that I am like a child beside you. Among our people it is not seemly that a wife should carry her husband in her arms like a baby. You will have to wait, and wait no little while, until a man fit to be your husband is born in our country."

And the girl reproached him:

"What are you saying?" she said. "What are you saying? I couldn't even think of such a thing . . . that I should ever take anyone but you. . . ."

But he went on:

"Do not be hurt, my beloved, at what I am saying, for so it must be. It was revealed to me when I saw you living here beside the gold

and with no merchants anywhere in sight. A time shall come when in our land, too, merchants, and even Tsars, shall be unknown. And when that time comes the people of our country will grow taller and stronger. One such man will come to Azov Mountain, and in a loud voice he will speak your beloved name. And when that happens, you must bury me in the earth and go out boldly and joyfully to meet him. For he will be your destiny. And when that time comes let them have all the gold, if they have need of it. But now farewell, my darling." And so saying he gave a last sigh and died as if he'd fallen asleep. And in that very instant the entrance to Azov Mountain was closed.

Those were no idle words he spoke. He was a wise man and he must have known something about the Magic Power. The Solikamsk people were adepts in those things, for they lived in the forest and had dealings with the wizards.

And since that day, look you, no one has ever been able to get inside Azov Mountain. The entrance to the cave can still be seen, but it has fallen in, as it were. And if anyone goes near it rocks fall down and frighten them away. So the mountain stands there deserted. Trees have sprung up all over it, and no one who did not know would ever suspect what is inside it.

But down inside the mountain, look you, there's an enormous cave. Everything in it is beautifully arranged. The floor, now, is wonderfully smooth and of the finest marble. And in the middle of the cave there's a fountain whose water flows like tears; and all around it there are stacks of gold, as high as the wood stacks in our timber-yard, and piles of chrysolites heaped up like coal.

And somehow or other, it is always light in the cave. And in it there lies a dead man, and beside him a girl of marvellous beauty sits and ceaselessly weeps. This girl never gets any older. As she was in her eighteenth year, so she has remained.

Many people have tried to break into the cave. They have tried all sorts of means. They dug tunnels—but they came to nothing. Even dynamite, look you, was of no avail. They tried to get into it by means of a trick. They stood on the mountainside and shouted all sorts of words, the oddest they could think of. They thought maybe they'd hit on the beloved name that would open the mountain. Well, there it is, you know what fools are. They went crazy in the end, babbling all sorts of gibberish that nobody could understand. They were trying to make up new names, look you.

No, 'twas a powerful spell had been laid on the cavern. And not till the appointed hour, will Azov Mountain be opened.

Only once was there a sign. That was in the days of Emelyan Ivanich,* when the workers assembled on Dumna Mountain here. And on that day, so I've heard our grandfathers tell, people heard what sounded like a song coming out of Azov Mountain. 'Twas as

* A reference to Pugachev's rebellion.

if a mother was playing with a baby and singing a merry lullaby to it.

But since then no more singing has been heard, only weeping and wailing. When the serfs were freed many people came up the mountain to listen and see if there was any sign. But no, the wailing went on as before. Even more sadly than before.

And this was just, for the power of money drives people even harder than the landowners' whips. And as time goes by, so things get worse, but I have to keep watch on Dumna Mountain. Because until he dies every man must eat and drink.

No, I shall not see the day when Azov Mountain opens. But you younger ones, maybe you'll be more fortunate.

I tell you this now: people will take away its power from gold. You mark my words: they will take it away. The Solikamsk man was right when he said this.

And any of you who live to see that day will see the treasure of Azov Mountain and will learn the beloved name by whose power the treasure will be revealed.

This tale is not as simple as it seems, look you. You need to think it over a bit in your head to get the meaning of it.

THE MISTRESS OF THE COPPER MOUNTAIN

ONE FINE SUMMER'S DAY TWO OF OUR FELLOWS FROM THE MINE WENT out to have a look at the hay-fields. The fields were a long way away, somewhere on the other side of the Severushka river.

A holiday it was, and sweltering hot; a regular steam bath, look you. The two men both worked at the mine, at the Gumyoshevsky mine that's to say. Malachite ore they extracted there and azurite, and sometimes clusters of crystal and other minerals came to light as well.

One of the two was a young fellow, not yet married; but already the gloom of the mines was in his eyes, look you. The other was older and he was quite broken down from work. His eyes were melancholy and his face was drawn and sallow. And he coughed all the time, this man.

It was lovely in the woods. The birds were singing joyfully, heat-haze was rising from the ground, and they felt gay and light-hearted; they were thawing out, look you. They went as far as the Krasnogorsk mine, where iron ore was being extracted in those days, and lay down in the grass in the shade of a rowan tree, and at once fell asleep. But suddenly the younger man felt as though someone had nudged him in the side and he woke up. He looked round him and there, sitting on a heap of ore beside a big rock, was a girl. Her back was turned to him, but he could tell she was a girl from her plait.

This plait was of a bluish-black colour and not hanging loose, as with our girls, but stuck to her back, as it were. And at the end of it were ribbons of a colour that seemed now to be red and now green. Her hair was transparent and it seemed to give out a faint jangling sound like sheet copper. The young fellow gazed at her hair in astonishment and then he took a closer look at her. This girl, now, she was not tall but well formed. And a regular catherine wheel she was; she did not stay still for one moment. First she bent down as though searching for something at her feet; then she jumped up and bent over to one side, and then to the other. One moment she would jump to her feet and wave her arms about; the next she would bend down to earth again. In short she was like a ball of quicksilver, look you. The young fellow could hear her speaking to someone, but in what language she talked and to whom she spoke, he could not tell. But it was all a great joke, for she was so gay.

And he was just about to say something to her, when suddenly a thought struck him like a blow on the back of the neck.

"Mother of mine, why it's the Mistress of the Mountain herself. Her very clothing. Why didn't I recognize her at once?" And he quickly turned his eyes away from her hair.

And her clothing was indeed such as you would not find anywhere else in the world. 'Twas of silken malachite, look you. Such stuff really exists. To the eye it looks like stone, but to the touch it is silky.

"Now I'm in a proper fix," the young fellow said to himself. "How can I slip away without her seeing me?" He had heard from the old folks, look you, that his Mistress, this malachite girl, loved to play pranks on human beings.

But while he was still thinking, she turned round. She smiled gaily at him and said in a playful tone of voice:

"How now, Stepan Petrovich, feasting your eyes on a maiden's beauty for nothing? You have to pay for such glances, you know. Come nearer. We will have a little talk."

The young fellow was rather frightened, of course, but he didn't show it. He plucked up courage: even if she was a magic spirit she was only a girl; and he was a man and was ashamed to be frightened of a girl.

"I haven't the time," he said, "to talk to you. We've overslept as it is and we're on our way to the hayfields."

The malachite girl laughed, and then she said:

"This will bring you good fortune. Come over, I say; I have business with you."

Well, the young fellow saw that there was nothing to be done. He went up to her and she beckoned to him to go round to the other side of the heap of ore. And he went round and saw a great swarm of lizards lying there. They were of every sort of colour. Some, look you, were green; others were light or darkish blue, and others the colour of clay or sand, with little spots of gold on them. And some

glittered like glass or mica, others were the colour of withered grass and still others were covered with beautiful patterns.

The girl laughed.

"Do not tread on any of my army," she said. "You are so big and heavy, and they are so small." And she clapped her hands and the lizards ran away and gave him room to pass.

The young fellow came a bit nearer to her and stopped. Then she clapped her hands again and said, still laughing:

"Now you must not move any further. For if you step on one of my servants, misfortune will befall you."

He looked down at her feet and the earth there was no longer to be seen. All the lizards had collected together in one spot, forming as it were a mosaic floor at her feet. Stepan went on gazing at them and suddenly, why, Heavens alive—it was all copper ore! Ore of every sort and all of it beautifully polished—mica and horneblende and every kind of malachitish ore.

"Well, do you know who I am, now, Stepanushko?" the Malachite Girl asked him, and so saying she burst out laughing. Then, after a bit, she said:

"Don't be frightened of me. I'll not do you any harm."

The young fellow was ashamed to be laughed at by a girl and that she should say such words to him. He plucked up all his courage and positively shouted at her:

"And how can I be afraid of anyone if I work in the mine?"

"That's splendid," the Malachite Girl replied. "You're just the man I was looking for: someone who is not afraid of anyone. Tomorrow when the miners are waiting at the pit-head to go down the mine, the manager will come along. Go up to him and say—and mind you do not forget the exact words: 'The Mistress of the Copper Mountain commands you, you stinking billy-goat, to go away from Krasnogorsk Mine. If you damage her iron cap here, she says, she will bury all the copper in the Gumyoshevsky Mine so deep in the ground that nobody will be able to get at it'."

Having said this, she frowned, and then went on:

"Do you understand, then, Stepanushko? You say you work in the mine and are not afraid of anyone? Well then, speak as I ordered you to the manager. And now go back to your companion, and mind you don't tell him anything about this. He's worn out, and it's no good worrying him by involving him in this business. See, here is a piece of azurite for him, to help him a little."

She clapped her hands again and immediately all the lizards ran away. Then she jumped up, caught hold of the rock in one hand, leaped into the air and started running round and round the rock, just like a lizard. Her hands and feet became green and just like a lizard's hands and feet; a long tail stuck out behind her; and a broad black stripe ran down her back as far as her waist. Yet her head remained a human head. She ran up on to the top of the rock and looked round her and said:

"Do not forget what I told you to say, Stepanushko; 'She commands you, stinking billy-goat, to go away from Krasnogorsk mine.' Do as I have told you, and I will be your bride."

At this the young fellow fairly spat with anger.

"Pah, you dirty creature! Me marry a lizard indeed!"

But when she saw him spitting she only laughed.

"All right," she said, "we'll talk about that afterwards. Maybe you'll change your mind!"

And with these words she vanished round the side of the rock, with a last flash of her green tail.

The young fellow was alone again. It was very quiet up there above the mine. The only sound to be heard was his friend snoring on the other side of the heap of ore. Stepan woke him up and they went on to the hayfields and saw how the grass was getting on. And towards evening came home again.

Stepan, of course, could think of only one thing: what was he to do? If he said the things to the manager the Malachite Girl ordered him to say, there would be no end of trouble, for the manager was indeed, an evil-smelling man—he had something wrong with his inside, so 'twas said. On the other hand, now, to disobey her and say nothing—well he was afraid to do that also. For was she not the Mistress of the Mountain who had it in her power to change all your ore into hornblende? And how then could you fulfil your allotted task? But above all he was ashamed of appearing a coward before a girl.

So he thought and thought, and at last he summoned all his courage and said: "Come what may, I will do as she ordered."

Early the next morning, when the drum-signal for going down the mine was given and the men were all collecting at the pit-head, the mine manager came along. All the other men took off their caps in silence, of course, but Stepan went up to him and said:

"I saw the Mistress of the Copper Mountain yesterday and she ordered me to tell you as follows: she commands you, stinking billy-goat, to go away from Krasnogorsk mine. If you damage her iron cap here, she will bury all the copper in Gumyoshevsky mine so deep that nobody can get at it."

The manager quivered with rage to his very whisker-tips.

"What is this? Are you drunk or have you gone mad? What Mistress? How dare you say such things to me? I'll have you rot in the mine."

"As you will," said Stepan, "but that is what she ordered me to say."

"Flog him," screamed the manager, "take him down the mine and chain him up in one of the stopes. And so that he doesn't die, feed him on dogs' food and give him the hardest possible tasks to do. And if he makes any fuss, thrash him mercilessly."

So they flogged Stepan and chained him up in the mine. And the mine overseer, who was also no mean cur, look you, chained him up in

the worst stope imaginable. 'Twas very damp and there was no good ore there and it ought to have been abandoned long before. And here they left him, having first fastened a long chain to his leg so that he could go on working. You know how it was in the days of serfdom: men were mocked and abused in every possible way.

"Here you can cool down a little," the mine overseer said to him, "and your task will be such and such an amount of pure malachite" —and he named an amount that was altogether impossible.

Well, there was nothing to be done about it. So when the overseer had gone, Stepan started to swing his pick; for he was a strong hefty fellow, look you. And after a while he peered round the stope and, lo, things were not so bad at all. Malachite was pouring out; it was just as if someone was handing it out to him. And the water in the stope all drained away somewhere and it became quite dry.

"This is fine," he said to himself. "I can see the Mistress has not forgotten me."

And as he thought this, it suddenly became quite light. He looked round, and there, standing beside him, was the Mistress herself.

"Bravo, Stepan Petrovich," she said, "I really can praise you. You were not afraid of the stinking billy-goat, but spoke out to him boldly. Come now, then, and see my dowry. I also keep to my word."

And as she said this she frowned, as though it were unpleasant to her. Then she clapped her hands again and the lizards came running up and took off the chain from Stepan's leg; and she ordered them:

"Double the amount of malachite stacked here; and see that it be of the very best quality, the silken kind." Then she said to Stepan: "Well, bridegroom, come along and see my dowry."

And off they went, she in front and he following. Wherever she went, the walls of the mine opened up before her. They went through enormous underground rooms, with walls of all sorts of different colours. Some were green, some were yellow with gold spots on them. Others again were copper-coloured; there were also blue rooms and azure rooms. In short they were all decorated in the most wonderfully beautiful way. And the dress which the Mistress of the Mountain was wearing—this too kept changing its colour. One moment it would be glittering like glass, the next it would become dull and cloudy; now it would flash with diamond dust, now it would seem copper-coloured; and now it would turn the colour of green silk again.

They walked on a long way, and then she stopped.

"Further on," she said, "there are many more such rooms, yellow ones and grey ones with designs on them. But why should you see them? We are now right in the centre of Krasnogorsk Mountain. Next to Gumyoshevsky Mountain this is the richest place I possess."

And Stepan looked round him and saw they were in a very large room with beds and tables and stools in it—all made of crystal. The walls were made of malachite and diamonds, and the ceiling was dark red almost, with copper flowers on it.

"Sit down here," she said, "and we will have a talk."

They sat down on stools and the Malachite Girl asked him:

"Have you looked at my dowry?"

"Yes, I have," said Stepan.

"Well now, and what about our marriage?"

Stepan did not know what to reply. He was already betrothed to a girl, look you. A beautiful girl, she was, an orphan. But of course her beauty was as nothing compared with that of the Malachite Girl. Just a simple, ordinary girl, she was. Stepan pondered and pondered and then he said:

"Your dowry is fit for a Tsar, but I am a simple working man."

"Come, dear friend," she said, "speak plainly. Will you take me to wife or no?" And so saying, she frowned terribly.

Stepan spoke straight out:

"I cannot because I am betrothed to another."

He said no more, and to himself he thought:" Now she will be angry." But she seemed to be highly pleased.

"Bravo, Stepanushko," she said. "I praised you for speaking as you did to the manager; but for this you deserve twice as much praise. You did not lay covetous eyes on my riches, you did not betray your Nastya for the Stone Girl " (and the young fellow's bride was, in truth, named Nastya.) "Here is a present for your bride," she said, and she handed him a big malachite casket. Inside it, look you, were all sorts of women's finery: ear-rings, rings and all the rest of it—the sort of thing even the richest girl might pine after.

"What? You will let me go back then?" the young fellow asked.

"You shall go back. Have no fear. All shall be arranged for you. You will be freed from the manager and you will live well and happily with your young wife. Only one condition I make: you must forget all about me when you leave this place. That will be my third test for you. And now come and sup a little."

She clapped her hands again and the lizards came running up and laid the table with food. She gave him a regular feast of delicious soup, fish pasties, mutton and kasha and all sorts of other dishes of the Russian kind. Then she said to him:

"Farewell, then, Stepan Petrovich, and see that you forget all about me." And as she said this, tears came into her eyes. She raised one of her hands and the tears fell plop-plop into the palm and turned into little round grains of precious stone. A whole handful of them, there were. "Here, then. Take these and profit by them," she said. "People will pay you big sums of money for these stones, and you will grow rich." And she put them into his hand.

The stones were cold but her hand was hot like a human hand and it trembled a little.

Stepan took the stones and bowed low to her and said:

"Where am I to go?" And he too felt full of sadness. She raised her hand and pointed and the wall opened in front of him and disclosed a long passage, like a drift, but inside it was as light as day

Down this drift went Stepan, passing all sorts of other treasures of the earth on the way and suddenly he found himself in his own stope again. The entrance of the drift closed up behind him and all was just as it had been before. One of the lizards came running up and fastened the chain to his leg again, and the casket the Malachite Girl had given him suddenly shrivelled up somehow, so that he was able to hide it under his shirt. And very soon the overseer came along; he thought he was going to have a great laugh. But what did he see? Stepan had hewn twice the amount of malachite that had been set him to hew, and it was malachite of the very finest quality at that. "What in the world is this?" the overseer said to himself. "Where did all this come from?" He took a good look round the stope and then said:

"This is the sort of stope everyone would want to hew in." And he moved Stepan to another stope and put a nephew of his in his place.

Next day Stepan started work again and malachite fairly poured out, and not only malachite, but crystal clusters as well. But as for the overseer's nephew, look you, not a scrap of ore could he get—nothing but rock and hornblende. The overseer was suspicious and he went and told the manager about it:

"There's no doubt about it," he said, "Stepan's sold his soul to the devil."

The manager answered:

"What he does with his soul is his own affair, but we must profit by the powers he's gained. Make him a promise to release him from serfdom if he can find a piece of malachite that weighs a hundred poods."

And he had the chain taken off Stepan and gave orders for the mining to cease at Krasnogorsk.

"Who knows," he said to himself, "it may be this fool was talking sense. A lot of copper used to come out with the ore there and it spoiled our iron."

The overseer told Stepan what they wanted of him. And Stepan answered:

"Who would not be free from serfdom? I will do my best, but whether I shall be able to find what you want, that is as luck will have it."

In no time Stepan found them the piece of malachite they wanted. They had it hauled up to the surface and very proud of it they were. 'Twas as if they said: 'Look what fine fellows we are!' But they did not release Stepan. They wrote to the master about it and he came down to see it, came all the way from Sam-Peterburkh, look you. He listened to what had happened and called Stepan to his presence.

"Listen now," he said, "I give you my word as a gentleman that if you can find me some blocks of malachite large enough to make pillars of not less than five sazhens in length you shall be released from serfdom."

To which Stepan replied:

"I've been tricked once before. I'm wiser now. First set me

free, and then I'll try and get your malachite. But whether I'll succeed or not, that we shall see."

Of course the master shouted and stamped and protested, but Stepan would not be gainsaid.

"And there's another thing which I was nearly forgetting," he told him. "You must make my bride free too. What good would it be if I was free and she was still a serf?"

The mine owner saw that Stepan was no easy man to handle, so he wrote him out a release from serfdom.

"There now," he said, "and see that you do your best."

Stepan insisted:

"It is as luck will have it."

Stepan found the blocks they wanted, of course. It was not for nothing that he knew all the inside of the mountain and that the Mistress herself was helping him. From these blocks they hewed out seven malachite pillars and hauled them to the surface and the master sent them to be set up in the principal church in Sam-Peterburkh. And the blocks that Stepan first found are still here, in our city, so they say, and they look on them as a great rarity.

And after that they released Stepan from serfdom, but from that time on all the riches in Gumyoshevsky mine seemed to disappear. There was a good bit of azurite, but it was mainly hornblende came out. As for crystal clusters, they became something unheard of altogether. Even malachite was lacking, and water began to flood the stopes. After this they ceased work in the Gumyoshevsky mines altogether and later on they became flooded. Men said the Mistress was angry because the blocks had been placed in a church; but 'twas not that at all.

And Stepan now, he was not happy in his life either. He married and had children and built a house, all as it should be. He should have lived comfortably and happily. But he was moody and sickly in health. He seemed to be fading away in front of your eyes.

Yet sick as he was he got himself a gun to go out shooting. He used always to go to Krasnogorsk mine, look you, yet he never brought anything back with him. And one autumn there was an end to him. He went out and did not come back. Where had he got to? They made up search-parties and went out to search for him. And he was lying dead, look you, on a big rock high up above the mine; and there was a smile on his lips and his gun was at his side, still loaded.

And those who first came upon him lying there said they had seen an enormous green lizard sitting beside him, bigger than any that had ever been known in these parts. It seemed to be mourning for the dead man, for as it raised its head tears streamed from its eyes. And when they came closer, it sprang on to a rock—and 'twas only the rock they saw. And when they had brought the dead man's body back and were preparing it for the grave, they saw that one of his hands was tightly clenched and in it some little green stones could be seen. A whole handful of them, there were. One man who happened

to be there and who knew a lot about these things, took a look at the stones and cried out:

"Why, they're copper emeralds! A very rare, precious stone. A regular fortune he's left you, Nastasia. Where on earth can he have got them from, these stones?"

Nastasia, Stepan's wife, told him that her husband had never mentioned these stones to her. There was a casket he had given her at the time they were betrothed. A big casket made of malachite. There were all sorts of jewels in that, but nothing like these stones. She had never seen them before.

They tried to wrest the stones out of Stepan's dead hand, but as soon as they did so they turned into dust. So even to this day people still don't know where Stepan got them from. Later on they started mining at Krasnogorsk again. No good; there was nothing but ore, brown ore with a copper lustre. Afterwards somebody got to know that those stones in Stepan's hand were the tears of the Mistress of the Copper Mountain. He wouldn't sell them, he wouldn't show them to anyone and in the end, with those stones in his hand, he died.

So that's what she is, the Mistress of the Copper Mountain.

Woe to the evil man who meets her—and little joy to the good man either.

THE MANAGER'S BOOT-SOLES

THERE WAS ONCE A MANAGER AT POLEVAYA CALLED SEVERYAN KONDRAtich. Lord, what a foul-tempered beast he was. Never since the mines were started had there been such a man. A cur among curs he was, a real beast.

And not the smallest thing did he know about mining, look you. How to flog people: that was all he knew. He belonged to the gentry and had had an estate of his own, but had got himself into trouble: and all on account of his foul temper. He'd flogged some men to death, and men from somebody else's estate, at that. There was an enquiry and the matter couldn't be hushed up in any way. So Severyan was taken to court about it and sentenced to exile. They gave him the choice of Siberia or coming to our mines here. And the Turchaninovs—the owners of the mines—jumped at the chance of employing a murderer like this and made him manager at Polevaya.

"Do us a kindness," they said to him, "and keep the people in order there, and if you happen to kill anyone no one will take you to court for it. We've got to keep the people quiet or who knows what they will be up to."

The last manager at Polevaya had been put on to a mould of molten iron. Many a man was flogged for this, of course, but they couldn't find out the guilty one.

"No one sat him on it," they said, "he sat on it himself. Must have got giddy or fainted or something. We tried to take him off the mould but by the time we got him off, the whole of his backside was burned away. It must have been the will of God that Death should take him from behind like that."

After this affair the mine owners thought they would raise a hullabaloo to keep the men cowed. So they appointed the murderer Severyan in the dead man's place.

Severyan, look you, had courage enough, but realized that a factory was not the same thing as an estate. You had to step more warily. The men were always in bunches, look you, and all on top of each other and you were always near the furnaces. And all had weapons of some kind or other; they might grab you with the clippers, or stun you with a hammer or knock you on the side of the head with a bar or do for you in some other way. It was easy enough. Or they could push you under a roller, or shove your head into a furnace.

"He caught alight," they'd say, "went too near the flames and got sucked in by them." They'd roasted the last manager that way.

So Severyan got himself a troop of guards. Goodness knows where he dug them up! Each one heftier and more brutal than the last. Scum of the earth, they were. Roving desperadoes from lazy corner. And with this gang he used to prowl round the factory. In his hand he would have a whip as thick as two fingers and with a knotted tail, and in his pocket there was a pistol, loaded in all four chambers. The pistol was always kept cocked so he only had to take it out of his pocket to fire it. And behind him came his gang, some carrying sticks, some carrying swords, and some armed with pistols like himself. Like an army setting out to war, it was.

And the first thing he'd do would be to ask the foreman:

"Who has not been working well?"

The foreman knew he could not speak well of everyone, or he might come under the lash for conniving. So he did his best to find fault with the men: picked on one for bad work, another because he disliked him, and another just for no reason at all. Anything to escape the whip himself. He had only to say something against a man and the manager would let fly with his whip. He used to do the flogging himself, look you. He'd sooner go without his food than miss the chance of flogging someone. That's the sort of man he was: in one word, a murderer.

Nevertheless he was chary of going down the mine at first. Going below ground is something you've got to get used to, whoever you are. It scares people; for it's so dark and you can't make it any lighter. Even if 'twas the owner himself going down the mine, they could only give him the ordinary little miner's lamp. And its light is so faint you don't even know it's burning. And then it's damp, too. And the men in the mine are like lost souls. They don't care whether they live or die. They're a desperate crowd; they don't give a curse for the mine officials. And then Severyan had heard, too,

about the Mistress who lived in the Copper Mountain and was angry if anyone oppressed the men who worked below the ground. So at first he was scared off.

But after a while he plucked up courage and went down the mine with his gang at his heels. And from then on he went down regularly. Evil as he had been before, he was now still worse. In the old days the floggings had always been carried out up on top, but he started a new custom. He used to thrash the men with his whip or any other weapon that came to hand down below in the very stopes. Every day he would go down, and always with only one aim in mind: how to do evil to the greatest possible number. And the more men he flogged the more cheerful he became. After a good day's flogging he would twirl his whiskers and call out to the overseer:

"Come on, old crosspatch. It's time we went up. I'm hungry and I'm all in a sweat."

Well, after he had been lording it like this down the mine for a week, a strange thing happened.

He had just shouted to the overseer that it was time to go up, when suddenly a voice, a clear ringing voice that seemed to come from somewhere very close, said:

"Have a care, Severyanko, or you'll leave your boot-soles to your children as a memorial!"

The manager started up:

"What was that?"

He looked round and, as he did so, he fell heavily, all but breaking his legs. His feet seemed to have become rooted to the ground and it was all he could do to wrench them away again. And the voice he had heard had been a woman's voice. Fear laid hold on him, but he did not show it and behaved as though nothing had happened. His guards did not say anything either, for truth to tell, they were scared. For they realized at once what it was: She had threatened them.

And so things got a little better. The manager stopped going down the mine, and the miners breathed freely for a bit. But not for long. The manager was ashamed, look you; the miners had heard this voice and now they would be laughing at him and saying he was afraid. And the thought of it was worse to him than a knife-thrust, for he always boasted that he was not afraid of anyone on earth. And when he went into the rolling-mill he heard one of the men say:

"Hi, look out for your boot-soles!" This had become a saying among them, with which they used to warn each other to be on their guard.

The manager thought to himself: "So they're laughing at me, are they." And the thought pricked him cruelly. But he didn't try to find out which one it was at the rolling-mill who had talked about boot-soles. He didn't even flog anyone this time. He assembled his band of guards at the rolling-mill and said to them:

"It's high time we went down the mine again to see that all is in order."

And down they went, and this time such fury seized the manager as had never been known before. Every single person he met with he thrashed. He'd show them he wasn't afraid of anyone.

And once again the voice was heard:

"I give you yet another warning, Severyanko, be kind to your children. Leave them your boot-soles."

The manager turned towards the voice and again he stumbled just like the last time. His feet were absolutely rooted to the ground. He looked down and saw that they had sunk into the rock. Quite two inches below the surface they were. He managed to pull them out, but as he did so, the uppers came away and the soles remained in the rock. He did not say anything then, but when they came up out of the mine he regained courage and asked his guards:

"Did you hear that voice in the mine?"

"Yes," they said, "we did."

"Did you see the way my feet stuck to the ground?"

"Yes, we did."

"What was the meaning of it, do you think?"

His guards thought to themselves a bit. Then one of them said:

"There's no doubt about it. It's the Mistress of the Copper Mountain giving you a sign. She's after threatening you—but what with we do not know."

"So," said Severyan. "Well then, listen to what I tell you. Tomorrow morning, at sunrise, be ready to go down to the mine with me. I'll teach them to frighten me by hiding women in the mountain! I'll go through all the stopes and galleries and when I catch that woman of theirs I'll thrash every inch of life out of her with this whip. Do you hear me?"

And when he got home he boasted to his wife in the same way. She, as women do, wept:

"Oh, oh, do take care, Severyanushko! At least get the priest to come and intercede for you!"

And sure enough they sent for the priest. And the priest came along and chanted something and read from his book, and hung an image round Severyan's neck and sprinkled his pistol with water. And he said:

"Have no fear, Severyan Kondratich; but if anything should happen, just repeat to yourself: 'I will arise saith the Lord!'"

At daybreak the next morning the manager's guards all turned up at the entrance to the mine. They were all very pale; but the manager himself was in the best of spirits. He stuck out his chest, straightened his shoulders, and they noticed that he had on a brand new pair of boots that shone like looking-glass.

"If I lose the soles of my boots this time, I'll teach that overseer a lesson! What do I care if he has worked here twenty years? I'll flay him alive! But the first thing to do is to find this woman of theirs. I'll give fifty roubles to the man who catches her."

So they went down the mine and started nosing round everywhere.

As usual the manager walked in front and his gang followed. Now the galleries were very narrow and they had to walk in single file. And all at once he saw someone in front of him, beckoning to him. Somebody was walking quietly along, waving a small lamp; and when this figure turned a corner he saw that it was—a woman. He shouted: "Stop!" But the woman took no notice and just glided on as though she hadn't heard anything. The manager rushed after her, but his faithful servants were not in such a hurry to follow him. They were scared; for they felt that strange things were afoot. It was She they were following. But neither did they dare to go back. For if they did, Severyan would flog them to death. So the manager rushed on alone and tried in vain to catch up with the figure. He yelled and screamed and threatened but she did not even turn round. And now they were all alone in the gallery, just the pair of them.

All at once the woman turned round and immediately it became quite light. The manager looked up, and there, standing before him, was a girl of marvellous beauty, with long dark eyebrows and eyes that shone like glowing coals.

"So," said the woman, "let us have a reckoning, Murderer. I warned you to cease your evil ways, and what did you do? You threatened to thrash the life out of me with your whip, did you? Well, what have you to say about it, now?"

Severyan was beside himself with fury and yelled:

"I'll do still worse to you. Hi, Vanka, Efim, come and seize this woman! Come and drag the dirty creature away!"

He meant this for his guards, for he thought they were close at hand.

But scarcely had he cried out when once again he had the feeling that his feet were stuck to the ground. And he yelled again in a different tone:

"Come here! Quickly!"

But the girl said to him:

"It's no use straining your throat. Your servants could not get into this place. And in a few moments many of them will not even be alive."

And, so saying, she made a little sign with her hand. And immediately there was a sound of falling rock and a rush of air at his back. And he looked round and saw a solid wall, as though no gallery had ever been there.

"Now what have you got to say?" the Mistress asked him again.

But the manager—he was in a great rage and, what is more, put his trust in the priest—pulled out his pistol.

"This is what I have to say!" and he fired. But the Mistress merely caught the bullet in the palm of her hand and tossed it back at him, saying calmly:

"Your pistol will not avail you here."

And then she seemed to give an order to someone. And the same instant the manager turned green from the knees downwards.

And now, look you, he started to whine and plead with her:

"Little Mother, little Dove, have mercy on me! I'll have my grandsons and great-grandsons pray for you. I'll leave the mine and never come back again. Give my soul time to repent its sins!" And he wept, with the tears rolling down his cheeks.

The Mistress fairly spat with disgust.

"Ekh, you lump of dirt, you filthy creature," she said, "you cannot even die decently. It makes one sick to look at you."

She made another sign with her hand, and now the manager turned green all over from top to toe. What had been the body of a man became nothing but a big block of stone. The Mistress went up to it and just touched it with her hand and the block fell over on its side and the Mistress vanished away, as it were.

Meanwhile the alarm had been sounded in the rest of the mine. Here was a fine to-do! A gallery had fallen in and the manager and his guards were somewhere inside it. It was a serious business. They called all the men together and organized rescue parties. And up at the mine-head, too, great commotion broke out. They sent word to the mine-owners at Sisert. And next day the officials from town came galloping up to the scene of the accident.

After two day's digging they reached the manager's guards. And here a wondrous thing came to light. Those of the guards who had been the wickedest were all dead, but those of them who'd had the slightest sense of shame were only injured.

They found them all; only the manager was missing. But in the end they broke into a gallery they hadn't known about before. Lying in the middle of it was a huge overturned block of malachite, and when they examined this they found that one end of it had been polished.

"What an extraordinary thing," they said to themselves. "Who can have polished the malachite in this place?" They examined the block very carefully and right in the middle of the polished part, they saw two boot-soles. Brand new ones, they were. You could see all the nails, three rows of them.

They went and told the mine-owner about it. He was an old man and it was long since he'd been down the mine, but he wanted to see for himself so he ordered the block of malachite to be hauled up to the surface, just as it was. And what a business it was getting it up! However, they managed it in the end.

As soon as the old mine-owner saw the boot-soles, he sobbed and said:

"Ah! What a faithful servant he was to me." Then he told them: "Have the body extracted from the stone and given an honourable burial."

So they sent straight off to Mramor for the best stone-cutter there. At that time a man called Kostousov was in renown, so they got hold of him. And the mine-owner asked him:

"Can you extract the body without damaging it?"

The master stone-cutter took a look at the piece of malachite, and then he said:

"And who is to have the boots?"

"You can have them," says the mine-owner, "and I'll pay you for your work, I'll pay you without stint."

"Well," said the stone-cutter, "I can try. But this stone is mighty good stone. You don't see the like of it every day. And I fear it will take a long time. If I tried to get the body out just as it is, it would stink too much. So I'll have to rough-hew the block first, and that will waste the malachite."

The mine-owner was annoyed at this:

"Don't bother about the malachite," he said. "How to get the body of my faithful servant out intact—that's all that matters."

"Every man according to his taste," said the stone-cutter.

He was a free man, look you, this Kostousov. And free in his speech, too. Well, so he started getting the murderer's corpse out of the block. He rough-hewed it first and took the pieces of malachite home. And then he started chipping out the body. But, mark you this now; where there should have been a body and clothes there was nothing but a heap of useless dust, though all around it was malachite of the choicest kind.

But the owner ordered this useless dust to be buried just like a human being, all the same.

Master Kostousov, for his part, grumbled:

"'Tis a shame! That malachite should have been sent away to be sawed. What a waste of good stone all on account of that manager. And of him, look you, what is there left? Nothing but the soles of his boots."

SOCHEN AND HIS STONES

NOW AFTER THE DEATH OF THAT STEPAN WHO DUG UP THE MALACHITE pillars, many people were drawn to Krasnogorka. They were after finding some more of those stones which had been seen clutched in Stepan's dead hand. 'Twas getting on for autumn, just before the snows, and you can't do much prospecting at that time of year. But as soon as winter was over they all streamed back there.

They burrowed and burrowed into the earth, brought up ton after ton of iron ore, saw that it was no good and gave it up. Only one man, Vanka Sochen, remained behind. Everyone else was getting ready for the haymaking, but he stayed on at the mine, bent on his own business.

He was not a regular prospector, this Vanka Sochen, just a hanger-on. As a boy he had been a servant in a nobleman's house, but had been kicked out for some offence or other. And the disease of servility—of licking noblemen's dishes for them—had never left him.

His one desire in life was to succeed at something, to better himself, as you might say. But how could a fellow like that do it? He had scarcely any education, so he couldn't become a clerk; he was not strong enough to work in the foundry; and as for the mines, he couldn't have stood it there for a week. So he became a prospector. Life's all honey for them, he thought. And he took a bite of it and liked the taste.

And then he found himself a job that just suited his snout; he became the nose and ears of the management. He still carried his prospector's scoop and made a great play at panning for gold but all the time he kept his eyes and ears open for any talk among the prospectors that would interest the management. And the officials found him useful and began to show him favours, assigning him the best places to work in and giving him presents of money and clothes and boots. As for the other prospectors, they had their account to settle with Sochen too, and they paid it—sometimes on his back and sometimes on his ears and sometimes on all parts of his body—according to his services. But Sochen, as servants are, was used to beatings. He would lie up for a few days and then be up to his old tricks again. And so he lived, with a foot in both camps, as you might say. And his wife, now, she was of a pair with him. Not an out and out bad lot, but . . . the Sponger they called her. She liked eating at other people's expense. They had no children, of course. How could you expect people like that to have any?

Well, as soon as the rumours went round about Stepan's stones, the miners all rushed off to Krasnogorka, and this Sochen, he went too.

"I'll do a bit of prospecting there myself," he thought, "I'm as good a man as Stepan. I wouldn't be such a fool as to crush the treasure in my hand."

Prospectors know where to look and for what. They dug for a bit at Krasnogorka, saw it was not the right kind of ore and stopped. But this Sochen fellow thought he knew better and stayed behind.

"'Twill not be myself if I don't find the treasure," he said. That's how conceited he was.

One day he was working in a drift, turning over the ore all in vain, when suddenly a heap of rock fell: about twenty poods of it or more. It nearly crushed Sochen's legs. He leaped back and there, in the hollow just in front of him, were two green stones. Sochen was overjoyed, thinking he had come upon a nest; and he stretched out his hand for the stones, but from the hollow came a hissing sound which made him weak with fear, and out leaped a cat. 'Twas brown all over from head to tail, without a single marking—only its eyes were green and its teeth glistened white. Fur on end, back arched and tail stiff as a candle, it was about to spring at him. Sochen turned and ran for his life. Two versts or more he must have run without once looking back, panting for breath and almost dead with fright, before he calmed down a little. At last he got home and shouted to his wife:

"Heat the bathhouse for me. Quickly! Something unpleasant has happened."

After his bath the fool told his wife all about it.

She, of course, advised him:

"Vanushka, you must go and see old granny Kolyesishko. Be very respectful to her, and she will tell you what to do."

There was such an old woman in these parts. She was a midwife, and she used to steam women in the bathhouses when their labour was upon them, and sometimes she would cover up a girl's mistake for her. Her legs were so bowed, look you, 'twas as if her body was set on a wheel. That's why they called her Kolyesishko.*

But Sochen was stubborn.

"I'll not go anywhere," said he, "and as for the mine, not even gold would tempt me there again! For another fright like that? No, never again!" And he was even going to pay a man to fetch his pick, so afraid was he to go himself.

But in two or three days his fear passed and then his wife said to him again:

"Go! Go and see Kolyesishko. She's a witch. She'll be able to tell you how to get those stones." For his wife also was greedy for the treasure, look you.

So Sochen went to Kolyesishko, and told her what had happened—though it was little enough the woman knew about precious stones. She sat there muttering:

"Dyr-gyr-byr. The snake fears the cat. The cat fears the dog. The dog fears the wolf. The wolf fears the bear. Dyr-gyr-byr. Don't touch me. I'll crumble." And other such witch's gibberish. And Sochen thought: "Akh, what a Wise Woman she must be."

And when he had told her all, the old woman asked him:

"Have you a dogskin coat, my son?"

"I have," he said, "but it's not much of a one, 'tis all in holes!"

"That is no matter," she said, "so long as it still smells of dog."

"It does that," he said, "it stinks of dog. The skins were taken from the bodies of hungry dogs."

"That is all right then. You must put this coat on and must not take it off again until you have brought the stones home with you. And in case you should run into danger again, I will give you for your protection a wolf's tail to hang round your neck and a piece of bear's fat to sew into your shirt. But these last will cost you money—and no small sum."

Sochen struck a bargain with the witch and ran home and fetched the money.

"Give me the tail and the fat," he said. And the old woman rejoiced that God had sent her this fool.

Sochen hung the tail round his neck and his wife sewed the bear's fat into the collar of his shirt. And thus equipped, he put on the

* Kolyeso is Russian for wheel, and kolyesishko is the diminutive form.

dogskin coat and set out for Krasnogorka. Everyone he met marvelled —to go about at midsummer in such a coat! But Sochen plodded on —he was in a fever of excitement—and took no heed of the sweat that poured from him.

He came to the mine and there was his pick lying just where he had left it. No one had touched it. Only the tiny hut at the pit-head had been twisted a little by the wind.

No one had been there while he was away. Sochen took a look round and started vainly turning over the ore. Evening was coming on. He was afraid to stay in the mine, and he was very tired. No joke it is to wield a pick in summer in a dogskin coat! A stronger man might have stood it, but Sochen was absolutely worn out. He lay down where he stood and fell asleep. Sleep is no man's brother; it takes all equally. The coward snores as loudly as the brave.

He slept well, better than he had ever slept before, and woke feeling much bolder. He took a bite of food and started work again. He dug and dug and all of a sudden, as before, there was a big fall of rock which nearly crushed his feet. Now the cat will jump out, he thought. But no, nothing happened; it seemed as if the wolf's tail and the bear's fat were helping him.

He went up to the hollow made by the fall and saw a new vein of ore had been opened up. He scraped away the rock all round it and put out his hand to take some of the ore. It was bluish in colour, a kind of azurite, and very light and porous.

After he'd been working at this for a while, he hit upon a nest of stones: he picked up six pieces of greenish stone, resting on the azurite in pairs. Sochen set to breaking the ore with all the strength he could muster, in the hope of finding some more stones. But 'twas no use. However much he sweated and strained he couldn't find any more. The vein seemed to have broken off, and even the ore gave out. 'Twas just as if someone had put it there for him to look at and then taken it away again.

But Sochen would not give in. He looked lovingly at the little stones, and set to with his pick. But it was no use. He was tired out and had eaten all the food he'd brought with him. He had to go home.

There was a track leading straight to the spring by the little bridge across the Severushko. And along this track he set off.

The forest was thick and desolate, but Sochen could just see the path; and he walked along counting up his gains, figuring out how much he would get for the stones. But suddenly he heard from behind him:

"Miau! Miau! Give us back our eyes."

Sochen turned round and saw three cats running after him. They were all brown and none had eyes. Any moment they would be on him. He turned aside into the forest and the cats after him. But what could they do there without eyes? Sochen had eyes but even

so he scratched his face and tore his dogskin coat to shreds as he rushed through the bushes. How many times did he not fall, get stuck in the bog and only with difficulty find his way back to the track again! Luckily for him, some peasants from Severna happened to be coming along with five carts, and when they saw a man, plainly at his last gasp, diving out of the forest, they picked him up without a word, put him on one of the carts and took him to Severna; and from there he dragged himself slowly home.

Darkness had fallen and Sochen's wife had already gone to bed, though she had not locked the door. She was a good-for-nothing creature and liked to laze about and leave the household affairs to manage themselves. Sochen struck a light, made a sign of the cross in all four corners of the room and opened his purse to take a look at his stones. He fumbled and fumbled, but could find nothing but a little pinch of dust. He must have crushed the stones! Sochen set up a wail and started calling Kolyesishko all the rude names under the sun:

"You didn't protect me from the cats at all, you old so-and-so. I gave you all that money and put this dogskin coat on, and all for nothing!"

His wife woke up; he struck her and swore at her. But she, seeing that her husband was beside himself, thought she would try a little sweetness. He hit out at her, but she said:

"Vanyushka, shall I heat the bathhouse for you?"

She knew how to manage him. Well, Sochen raged and roared and then he calmed down and told his wife everything—to the last drop. And at this she herself began to howl. She looked at the dust in the purse, took a little on her finger and licked it, and howled again. And so they howled together, the pair of them. And then his wife began to give him advice:

"'Tis plain," said she, "Kolyesishko's powers are not great enough. You must go and get the priest to help you."

At first Sochen would not hear of this. He was afraid of the very thought of going back to the mine. But a woman, you know, is like autumn rain: day after day it pours down and sinks in . . . and Sochen, too, began to feel a little more like himself.

"'Twas foolish of me to have been frightened of those cats," he thought. "What could they have done to me and they without eyes?"

So he went to the priest and told him all: "'Twas this way, father," he says.

The priest thought and thought and said:

"My son, you must promise to bring me the first stone you find to set in a halo for the Mother of God, and then you will add to it as much as you can."

"I will," Sochen said. "If I find twenty stones, I'll not grudge you five of them."

Then the priest started reading over Sochen, first from one book,

then from a second, then from a third. Then he sprinkled him with holy water, made the sign of the cross over him, took fifty kopecks from him and said:

"My son, you would do well to wear a little crucifix made of cypress wood from Mount Athos. I have such a cross, and it is costly. But I'll let you have it for a price you can afford." And he named a sum that was twice what Kolyesishko had asked.

Well, you can't bargain with priests. Sochen went home and he and his wife raked together all the money they had. He bought the crucifix and boasted to his wife:

"Now I'm not afraid of anyone."

The next day he made ready to go to the mine. His wife had washed out his shirt—the one with the bear's fat in it—and mended the torn dogskin coat as best she could. Sochen put the wolf's tail round his neck and the crucifix also and set off for Krasnogorka. Everything was as it had been before: nothing had been moved. Only the tiny hut had been twisted a little more. But Sochen had no thought for that. He went straight to the drift. But he had only just swung his pick when a voice asked:

"So you've come again, Vanya? Are you not afraid of the cats with no eyes?"

Sochen turned round and there was Herself, sitting almost beside him. He recognized her at once by her malachite dress. He lost the use of his arms and legs and his tongue babbled senselessly:

"Certainly, certainly . . . Dyr-gyr-byr . . . Holy . . . Holy . . . crumble!"

But She only laughed:

"Don't be afraid. I am not one of the eyeless cats! Better tell me: what do you want here?"

Sochen stuttered:

"C-certainly, c-certainly . . . Dyr-byr-gyr. . . ." Then he plucked up courage a bit and told her: "I've come to look for the stones. The kind of stones people saw in Stepan's hand. . . ."

She frowned:

"Do not utter that name! But I will give you the stones. I know what a great prospector you are and I have heard about you from the others. You seem to be very useful to them."

"Of course, of course. . . ." Sochen exclaimed joyfully, "I always do my duty."

"It's for doing your duty that I'm going to reward you now. But there is one condition, mind. You must not sell the stones to anyone. Not one single one, look you. You must take them straight to the manager. He will reward you himself. Then the State Treasury will give you a further reward. Enough to last you the rest of your life. So much will fall to you, you'll scarcely be able to carry it home."

Having said this, she took his arm and led him into the mine. As they went down she touched a huge rock with her foot; the rock rolled

away revealing a secret recess. And there in a bed of blue ore were green stones, heaps and heaps of them.

"Take as many as you want," she told him, and she stood and watched him.

Sochen was but a small prospector, yet he had a very big purse—bigger than anyone else's, it was. He filled it till it bulged, but wanted still more. He wanted to stuff his pockets, too, but was afraid of the Mistress, who looked angry, though she said nothing. There was nothing he could do but thank her. He looked round but nobody was there. He turned back to the recess, but it, too, had vanished. It might never have been there at all. In its place was a great rock that looked like a bear. Sochen felt his purse; it was still there, full to bursting. He took one more look at the place where he'd taken the stones and then hurried off home as fast as he could. He ran and ran feeling his purse to make sure he still had it. He waved the wolf's tail over it and rubbed it with the crucifix, then ran on again. He got home long before nightfall and his wife was quite alarmed to see him so early:

"Shall I heat the bathhouse?" she asked.

But he was like one possessed.

"Draw the curtains! Cover up the windows!" he shouted. His wife covered the windows with whatever came to hand, and Sochen put the purse on the table.

"Look!"

His wife saw that the purse was crammed full of little green stones. At first she rejoiced and crossed herself. Then she said:

"But maybe they aren't real."

Sochen was furious:

"You fool! I got them from the mine, I tell you. Who would go and put false stones in a mine!" He did not tell her that the Mistress herself had shown him the stones and imposed a condition on him. But his wife was still doubtful:

"If you could fill your purse so quickly, then men with horses will go and take the stones away by the cart load. What use will they be then? Just toys for children and beads for girls."

Sochen was beside himself with rage:

"I'll show you what these stones are worth this instant!"

He dropped five of the stones into his hand, hung the purse round his neck and ran off to the expert at the mine.

"Kuzma Mironich, look at these stones," he said.

The expert looked; he put his magnifying glass to his eye and looked again. Then he tested them with acid.

"Where did you get them?" he asked.

And Sochen, the office nose, said at once:

"At Krasnogorka."

"In which part?"

Sochen thought he'd be cunning and told him it was the spot where he had first worked.

"That's strange," the expert said. "It's not usual to find emeralds in iron ore. Did you find many of them?"

Sochen pulled out his purse and laid it on the table. The expert looked inside the purse and gasped. Then he caught his breath and said:

"I congratulate you, Ivan Trifonich! Fortune has favoured you. Do not forget us small people when the time comes." And he shook Sochen by the hand and treated him with great respect. It's a wonder what wealth will do to people! "Come with me now and see the Manager right away," he said.

Sochen tried to make excuses:

"I ought to have a wash first and change my clothes," he said; for he wanted to hide some of the stones for himself. But the expert insisted:

"With a purse like that you could go and see the Tsar himself, let alone the Manager," he said. "He wouldn't turn up his nose at you—he'd receive you at any time."

Well, there was no way of getting out of it, so off they went to see the Manager. In the Manager's office some sort of meeting was going on. The old gentleman who owned the mine was there; he had just arrived. He was sitting in the middle of the room with his ear-trumpet glued to his ear and the Manager was bellowing into it.

The expert told them what he had come about and the Manager then bellowed into the old gentleman's ear-trumpet:

"We've found some copper emeralds. One of our trusted men has brought them to us. We must give him a fitting reward."

They brought in Sochen. He pulled out his purse and gave it to the old gentleman, at the same time kissing his hand.

The old gentleman was astonished:

"Where did he learn such manners?" he asked.

"He used to be in service," the Manager bellowed.

"One can tell that at once," the old gentleman said. "They talk about these ex-servants making bad workmen—and now just look what this fellow's brought in!"

He tossed the purse up in his hand and all the other mine officials gathered round. The more important of the gentlemen also buzzed around. The mine owner tried to undo the purse but it had no strings so he asked Sochen to open it for him. Sochen was eager to be of service. He pulled the strap and opened the mouth of the purse as wide as he could:

"If you please!" he said.

But then, look you, such a stench came out of the purse as no one could endure. 'Twas as if someone had brought the stinking carcass of a horse or cow into the room. The gentlemen who stood nearest put their handkerchiefs to their noses, and the mine owner turned on the Manager:

"What is the meaning of this? Are you trying to make a fool of me?"

The Manager thrust his hand into the purse but there was nothing whatever in it: the stench it let out was even worse. The old gentleman put his hand to his mouth and rushed out of the room, and the others followed. Only the Manager and Sochen remained. Sochen turned pale and the Manager positively quivered with rage.

"What do you mean by this? Eh? Where did you collect this foulness from? Who put you up to it?" he asked.

Sochen saw that things looked black for him and there was nothing to do but make a clean breast of it. He told the whole story, concealing nothing. The Manager listened to the end, and asked:

"She promised I'd give you a reward, did she?"

"Yes, she promised," sighed Sochen.

"Take it then!" And so saying he gave Sochen such a punch on the jaw that it sent him flying and he caught his head a crack on the angle of the wall. "That's only earnest money," he shouted. "The reward you'll receive in the flogging-room. And you won't forget it to the end of your days."

And indeed the next day Sochen got so many strokes of the knout he couldn't even stand up after it and had to be taken to hospital on a stretcher.

But the Manager fared no better. That same day the old gentleman packed him off to Krilatovsk, to be overseer there.

"Let him get a bit of an airing up there," he said. "He smells too. strong altogether. It's no wonder they call him 'billy goat'—and I can't stand the sight of him now. After what happened yesterday, he makes me sick."

And as overseer at Krilatovsk the Manager stayed till the end of his days. After the easy time he'd had of it as a manager, 'twas very galling for him. So the Mistress of the Mountain had her fun at his expense too.

THE MALACHITE CASKET

NOW WHEN STEPAN DIED HE LEFT HIS WIFE, NASTASIA, A MALACHITE casket full of all manner of jewels. There were rings and necklaces in it and all sorts of other women's trinkets. 'Twas the Mistress of the Copper Mountain herself bestowed it on Stepan at the time when he and Nastasia were betrothed.

Nastasia had grown up an orphan child and was not used to grand things, jewellery and the like. Nor was she the kind who likes to make a display. She did wear some of the jewels in the first years of their marriage, of course. But somehow or other her heart was not in it. She would put one of the rings on her finger . . . and 'twould seem to be just the right fit, neither too tight nor too loose . . . yet if she went to church or called on a neighbour it would feel uncomfortable

almost at once. Her finger would feel fettered, as it were, and the nail would turn blue. When she put on the ear-rings it was still worse. They weighed her ears down so heavily that the lobes swelled. Yet in her hand they'd feel no heavier than the ones she usually wore. There was also a necklace of six or seven rows of beads and this she only put on once. 'Twas like so many strings of ice round her neck and they wouldn't get warm at all. She never showed this necklace to anyone. She was ashamed.

"Goodness!" they might say, "just look what a Tsarina has alighted among us at Polyevsky!"

Nor did Stepan try to make his wife wear the jewels from the casket. Once, indeed, he even said:

"Put them out of harm's way somewhere."

So Nastasia put the casket in the lowest of a pile of trunks where she kept her spare linen and the like.

When Stepan died and the stones were found in his dead hand, Nastasia increased the general excitement by showing the casket to people; and the man who had spotted that the stones were copper emeralds said to her, as the others were leaving the hut:

"Mind now you don't sell that casket for a song. It is worth thousands."

Now this man had had some schooling and he was a free man too. Once he had been a foreman, but he was dismissed because he was too soft with the men. Well, he was never one to turn up his nose at a glass of liquor—and a mighty bottle-man he was, God rest his soul! But in all else he was a right-minded man and if ever you wanted a petition written out or a sample washed or some soil tested, he would do it, and do it properly—not like the fellows who are always on the look-out for a dram. Men are not wanting who'll treat their own special cronies, yet there wasn't a soul but would gladly treat him to a glass at holiday times. And so he lived around our works until he died, getting his meat at other men's tables.

Nastasia had heard her husband say that this foreman was a good fellow and knew his job well, even if he did have a weakness for drink, so she followed his advice.

"I'll keep it by for a rainy day," she said. And she put the casket back in the trunk.

They buried Stepan and mourned him forty days as was the custom. Now Nastasia was a woman in her prime, and well to do into the bargain and plenty were ready to make a match of it with her. But she was no fool was Nastasia, and she said the same thing to all of them:

"Though you were rich as rich can be, you'd still be a step-father to my children!"

So they kept off for the time being.

Stepan had left his family quite well provided for. They had a good house, a horse, a cow—altogether a well set up household it was. Nastasia was a hard worker; the children were heedful and

well-behaved; and for a time things went well for them. A year passed, two years, three years. . . . But after that they began to feel the pinch. After all, how could she, a lone woman with three small children, manage her little farm all by herself? Time came when she had to turn a few kopecks, if only to buy salt. And now Nastasia's relatives began dinning into her ears:

"Sell the casket, what good is it to you? Why keep something you can't use? And Tanyushka won't wear them when she grows up. They're only fit for gentlefolk or rich merchants to buy. They're not for the likes of us. And look what a price you could get for them! 'Twould set you up for life, it would."

They did all they could to persuade her. And would-be purchasers swooped down on her like ravens on dead mens' bones. Merchants they were, most of them. Some offered a hundred roubles, some two hundred:

"Out of consideration for your widowed state and your young children, we will make a concession," they said.

They thought 'twould be easy to get round a woman. But Nastasia had in mind what the old foreman had told her—not to let the casket go for a song. And she would have been sorry to sell it in any case. It had been her bridegroom's gift; 'twas something to remember him by. And besides this, her little girl had begged her with the tears streaming from her eyes:

"Please don't sell it, Mummy! Please don't sell it! Send me out to earn something, but don't sell Daddy's present."

Stepan and Nastasia had three children, look you. There were two boys—ordinary lads enough—and there was this little girl who didn't seem to take after either of her parents. Even in Stepan's lifetime, when Tanya (that was her name) was quite a tiny thing, people used to gaze at her in amazement. And not only women but men too used to say to Stepan:

"That's a strange child you've got, Stepan, and no mistake. Who does she take after? Dark-haired and pretty and eyes as green as green—she's quite different to our girls!"

Stepan used to joke about this, saying:

"That she's dark is not surprising after all the years her father's spent under the earth. And if her eyes are green—that's no wonder either. Many's the ton of malachite I've hewn out for the Master Turchaninov. This was left me as a keepsake to keep my memory green."

For this reason they nicknamed the child 'Keepsake.' "Hullo little Keepsake!" they'd say to her. And if anyone bought her anything, they always got something green or light-blue.

So the little girl grew up, getting a lot of attention from people. And indeed it was as if she were some bright thread from a gay festive belt. You could see her from a long way off. And though she was not a child that took kindly to strangers everybody made a fuss of her and called her Tanyushka this and Tanyushka that. Even the most

envious women, the sourest old maids, admired her. Well, you know the way it is—all the world loves a pretty face! The only person who didn't seem happy about her was Tanyushka's mother; and she sighed and said:

"Beautiful—yes, to be sure. But it's not ours, this beauty of hers. 'Tis as if the child was a changeling."

The little girl missed Stepan dreadfully. She became thin and pale and quite pined away. All eyes, she seemed. One day the idea came to her mother of giving her the malachite casket to look at. "I'll let her play with it," she thought. "Little girls like dressing up, no matter how small they are." So Tanyushka was given the jewellery to play with. And wonder of wonders—whatever she tried on seemed to be just right for her. Her mother, now, she never knew what trinkets went with what, but Tanyushka knew all about it. And she said to her mother:

"What a lovely present Daddy gave you, Mummy! The stones make me feel quite warm: it's as good as sitting on the bench by the stove. And they're so lovely and soft to touch!"

Nastasia, who was sitting sewing, called to mind when she had worn the jewels—how her fingers had felt numbed and how her ears had ached and her neck had been ringed with ice. "There's something queer about this," she thought to herself; and she quickly picked up the casket and put it back in the trunk. But from that day onwards Tanyushka was always asking her:

"Please, Mummy, let me play with Daddy's present!"

For a time Nastasia held firm, but you know what a mother's heart is! She didn't like to disappoint the child, so she let her have the casket again, only she cautioned her:

"Mind you don't break anything."

Later, when Tanyushka began to grow up, she used to take the casket down herself. Her mother would go out with the two boys to work in the fields, and she would be left to look after the house. First, of course, she did the things her mother had told her to do: washed up the cups and spoons, shook the tablecloth, swept out the floor of the shed, fed the chickens and made up the stove. She'd do these tasks as quickly as she could and then she'd go and get the casket. There was only one of the upper trunks left now and it was a very light one. Tanyushka put it down on a stool; took out the casket; looked at the beautiful jewels and tried them on.

One day a robber got into the house. He must either have hidden in the garden early in the morning or somehow slipped in later. Anyhow, none of the neighbours saw him come. He was a stranger to these parts, but it would seem someone who knew about the casket had put him up to it, and told him all the ins and outs of the place.

After her mother had gone to work, Tanyuskha hurried over the household chores as quickly as she could and then went back to the cottage to play with her father's trinkets. She had just put on a headpiece and a pair of ear-rings when into the cottage crept this

robber. Tanya looked round and saw a strange man standing in the doorway armed with an axe. And it was their axe; she'd just put it down in a corner of the shed when she was sweeping. Little Tanyushka was terrified and sat there as though rooted to the spot. The stranger suddenly uttered a shriek of pain, dropped the axe and covered his eyes with his hands as if they were burning. He screamed and yelled:

"Help! Help! I'm blinded! I'm blinded!" and kept rubbing his eyes.

Tanyushka could see there was something wrong with him and she asked him:

"Why did you come here, little uncle, and why were you carrying our axe?"

But he went on groaning and rubbing his eyes as before. Tanyushka felt sorry for him, look you, so she took a dipper full of water and was about to hand it to him when the man backed out of the door, saying:

"Don't come any nearer! Don't come any nearer!" And he sat down in the passage, blocking up the door so that Tanyushka couldn't run out. But she found another way; she climbed through the window and fetched the neighbours. They came and questioned the man, asking him who he was and why he had come there. By this time the man had recovered somewhat, and he made up some story that he'd been passing through the settlement and had just called at the house to beg for a bit to eat and then something had happened to his eyes.

"Like sun-stroke it was. I thought I'd been blinded. Must be the hot weather, I suppose."

Tanya didn't tell the neighbours anything about the casket or the axe; and they just said to themselves:

"O, 'tis nothing. The mother must have forgotten to shut the gate and then this tramp walks in and hurts his eyes somehow. Such things are always happening."

All the same they didn't let the man go until Nastasia returned. When she and her sons came back from work, the tramp told her the same story that he'd told the neighbours. Nastasia took a quick look round, but seeing that nothing had been stolen, she made no great to-do about it. So away went the man and the neighbours too.

When they had gone, Tanyushka told her mother the whole story. And Nastasia realized that the robber had broken in to steal the casket but that it wasn't so easy to steal it. "All the same," she thought to herself, "I'd do better to put it in a safer hiding-place."

So when Tanyushka and the other children were out of the way, she took the casket and opened the trap-door leading to the cellar and hid it there.

The next day she and the boys went out to work as usual. Tanyushka finished doing the chores and went to get the casket—but not

a sight of it! Bitterly disappointed about this she was, when all of a sudden she felt a breath of warm air. "What can it be? Where is this warmth coming from?" she wondered. She looked round and saw a light shining from underneath the floor. "Goodness! Is the house on fire?" she thought, terrified. And looking down through the trap-door she saw a bright light in one corner of the cellar. Tanya seized a bucket to throw some water on the fire, but when she looked more closely there was neither fire nor smoke. She rummaged about in the corner where the light came from and there, look you, was the casket. She opened it and the jewels in it seemed more beautiful than ever. All sorts of different lustres they had, and they shone as bright as sunshine. Tanyushka didn't take the casket up to the living-room. She stayed in the cellar and played there with the jewellery to her heart's content.

And after that day, so it went on. Her mother thought: "The casket's well hidden. No one but me knows where it is." And Tanyushka spent happy hours playing with her father's present whenever she was left to look after the house. As to selling the casket, Nastasia wouldn't hear of it:

"When the time comes," she said, "but not before."

She had a hard struggle to keep going sometimes, but she didn't give in. And after a few years' struggle things began to be a bit easier for them. The two boys were old enough to earn a little and Tanya—she didn't sit with her arms folded either. She, look you, had learned to make embroideries out of beads and silk. So fine they were, these embroideries of hers, that even needlewomen working for the gentry held up their hands in admiration when they saw them. Where did she get her designs? And such beautiful silk?

This had also been a thing of chance. One day a woman called at their house, a short, black-haired woman about the age of Nastasia. Very sharp eyes she had, and she seemed an unusually lively, restless sort of person. On her back she carried a knapsack of cerise linen and in her hand was a cherry-wood staff. A sort of pilgrim she seemed.

She said to Nastasia:

"Little mother, could you let me rest here for a day or so? I'm so weary my legs won't carry me any further, and I've a long way to go."

Nastasia was afraid at first it was someone sent to steal the casket again, but she let her come in:

"It's not that I grudge a body a place to lay her head. You won't wear out the place you lie on, nor take it away with you. But you'll find we have nought but orphan's fare to eat here. Kvass and onions for breakfast, onions and kvass for supper—that's all the change we get. But if you're not afraid of growing thin, make yourself at home and stay as long as you wish."

Before the words were out of her mouth the stranger had put down her staff, laid the knapsack on the side of the stove and started to take off her boots. This haste annoyed Nastasia.

"Ah, the baggage!" she thought to herself. "I've only just asked her in and already she's treating the place as if it were her own."

And in truth the woman had already undone her knapsack and, beckoning to Tanyushka said:

"Come and look at my handiwork, little girl. If you like it I'll teach you how to do it. You seem to have a keen eye for this sort of work."

Tanyushka went up to her and the woman showed her a little handkerchief embroidered in silk at the borders. And the pattern of the border was so bright and gay that the whole house seemed to be brightened and warmed by it. Tanyushka's eyes popped out of her head at the sight of it, and the woman laughed and said:

"So you like my embroideries, little one. Would you like me to teach you?"

"Indeed and I would," said Tanyushka.

Nastasia was indignant:

"Whatever are you thinking of, child? We've not enough to buy a bite to eat and here are you thinking of silk embroideries! Materials like that cost money!"

"Do not worry yourself about that, little mother," the stranger said. "If your daughter can learn, it's not materials she'll lack. In return for your hospitality I'll leave her enough to last a long time. After that, you'll see for yourself: people will pay good money for work like this. We don't do it for nothing; we profit by it."

After this Nastasia couldn't very well refuse:

"Well, since you're going to leave her a little stock why shouldn't she learn? Let her if she shows any turn for it. I shall be grateful to you."

So the woman set to teaching Tanyushka how to make embroideries like hers. Tanyuskha learned very quickly—'twas almost as if she'd done it before. And another strange thing: Tanyushka had never been one to show much affection even for her own folk, much less strangers; yet she took to this woman from the start and seemed to grow fonder of her each day.

Nastasia now, she was not too pleased about this:

"So she's found herself a new mother, has she? Doesn't care about her own flesh and blood and yet clings to this tramp-woman!"

And it irked her too that the stranger always called Tanyushka 'child' and 'little daughter' but never once by her Christian name. Tanyushka could see that her mother didn't like her being so attached to the stranger, but she couldn't help herself. And so fond of her had she grown, she even confided in her about the casket.

"We've got a precious malachite casket," she told her. "'Twas left us by Daddy. You should see the jewels in it. I could look at them for ever and ever."

"Will you show them to me, little daughter?" the stranger asked her.

Tanyushka—it never entered her head that there'd be anything wrong in it—said:

"When the others are out I'll show them to you."

And when the time came Tanyushka called her and they went down into the cellar. Tanyushka opened the casket and showed her the jewels. The woman said:

"Put them on: I'll be better able to see them then."

Tanya was only too pleased to do so. She put all the jewels on, and the woman stood and admired her.

"Splendid, little daughter, splendid!" she said. "Just a few changes needed, that's all."

And she went up to her and touched the jewels with her hand. Every stone she touched changed colour. One moment they'd be sparkling one colour, next moment another. Tanyuskha couldn't see them all: only some here and there.

And after this the woman said:

"Now stand up straight, little daughter."

Tanyushka did as she bade her and the woman gently stroked her hair and then her back. She stroked her all over and then said:

"I want you to turn round so that you can't see me. Look straight in front of you and take note of everything but don't speak. Now, turn round."

Tanyushka obeyed and there before her was a great hall, the like of which she'd never seen before. It might have been a church, it might have been anything. The lofty ceiling rested on pillars of pure malachite. The walls were also faced with malachite to the height of a man and along the top ran a cornice with a design in malachite. Straight in front of Tanyushka, just as if she was looking into a mirror, stood a beautiful woman—beautiful as only women in story-books are. Her hair was black as night and her eyes were green. All decked out she was in precious stones and her dress was of green shot velvet. And this dress of hers was cut just like Tsarinas' dresses in pictures. A wonder how she kept it on, it was! Our women here would be ashamed to wear such a dress, but the green-eyed beauty stood there quite coolly, just as if it was the normal thing. And the hall was filled with people. All dressed like the gentry they were, and decorated with gold and medals. Some wore their medals in front; others had things tacked on their backs, others all round them. Government officials they looked like. And the women with them—they were all dressed up too. They too had bare arms and breasts and wore all sorts of jewellery. But what were they compared to the green-eyed girl? Not worth the sole of her shoe!

Next to the green-eyed beauty stood some fair-haired man. He was cross-eyed, and his ears stuck straight up like a hare's. But the clothes he wore eclipsed everything. Gold was not enough for this fellow, look you. He had to have precious stones on his shoes. And such big ones you couldn't find the like in ten years. You could

see at a glance he was some mine-owner, this one. He was mumbling something to the green-eyed beauty but she scarcely so much as lifted an eyebrow; he might not have been there at all.

Tanyushka gazed long at the beauty, admiring her; but then cried out in surprise:

"Why, those are Daddy's jewels she's wearing." And as she uttered these words the hall and everybody in it vanished and all was as it had been before.

The stranger-woman laughed:

"You didn't see it to the end, little daughter! But never mind: you will see the rest in due course."

Tanyushka, of course, wanted to know what this hall was she had seen.

"That was the Tsar's palace. The very chamber decorated with malachite from the mines here. 'Twas your father who got them the malachite."

"But who was that wearing Daddy's jewels and who was that man who looked like a hare?"

"Ah well, that I won't tell you. But one day you'll find out all about it yourself."

That evening when Nastasia came back from work the stranger was making ready for the road. She thanked Nastasia for her kindness and gave Tanyushka a bundle of beads and silks. Then she took out a tiny little button. It might have been of glass and thornapple-wood, just an ordinary common button. She handed it to Tanyushka and said:

"Take this to remember me by, little daughter. If ever you forget anything about the embroideries or if ever you get into trouble of any kind, look at this button and it will tell you what to do."

Having said this, she left them, and the next moment she was out of sight.

After this, Tanyushka became quite an expert at embroidery.

She was grown up now and of an age to marry. The young men of Polyevsky quite wore their eyes out gazing at Nastasia's windows, but they were afraid to make any advances. The girl was so aloof and solemn, look you. And besides she was free and they were serfs, so how could they hope to get her to marry them. Who would wittingly put a yoke round their neck?

Now the mine-owner and his family, they too got to hear of Tanyushka's wonderful embroidery and began sending their people to her. They dressed up one of their servants, who was fairly young and handsome, to look like a gentleman, gave him a watch and chain to wear and sent him to see her, on some business pretext. Maybe the wench will take a fancy to the young fellow, they thought, and then we can easily get her into our service. But they didn't succeed in their plan. Tanyushka talked about the work and would not take notice of anything else the lackey had to say, and when he began to bore her she made fun of him:

"Hurry up and go home, my dear. They're waiting for you. They're frightened you might lose that watch and wear away the gold from the chain. One can see you're not used to wearing it by the way you're fingering it."

To this lackey or any other of the gentry's servants words such as these were like boiling water on a dog's back. He ran back to his master as if he'd been scalded, snorting:

"A girl indeed! More like a stone statue she is, that green-eyed wench. The likes of her we can always find."

That's what he said to himself, but smitten he was, all the same. For whoever was sent to Tanyushka's house could not forget her beauty. It drew them like a spell. Anything to catch a peep at her, if only through the window. And of a Sunday or on holidays there was scarcely a bachelor in the whole district who didn't pass that way. They trod a path outside her window, but Tanyushka never so much as looked at them.

The neighbours began to blame Nastasia for this.

"What does your Tatiana think she's doing, giving herself airs? She has no girl friend and won't have anything to do with the boys. Is she waiting for a prince to come and court her, or does she think to become a bride of Christ and enter a nunnery?"

Nastasia only sighed and said:

"O my good neighbours! 'Tis far from understanding her I am myself. Such a good sensible girl she used to be—and then that tramp woman came and bewitched her. And now when you say anything to her she just stares at a button that this witch gave her. I'd have thrown the accursed button away, but she uses it for her work. Whenever she has to choose a different coloured silk she picks it up and looks at it. She did show me, too, the way to do it, but my eyesight's so bad I couldn't see anything in it. Maybe I ought to give her a good hiding, but then she works so hard, look you. If it wasn't for what she earns I don't know how we'd live. Sometimes when I think about it, I can't help shouting at her. And she says: 'Mummy, I know that my fate does not lie here. That is why I welcome no one and don't join in their games. Why should I hurt people if I can avoid it? And the reason I sit close to the window is that the light is better for my work there. Why must you be angry with me? What have I done wrong?' And what can I answer her?"

For all that, life grew easier for them. Tanyushka's embroideries became the fashion; not only round our works and in our town but in other places as well, people got to know about them, and sent their orders and paid handsomely as well; a good workman would have been pleased to earn as much. But just then a misfortune befell them: their house caught fire. It happened at night. Cattle-shed, cart-shed, horse, cow, tools and implements—everything was destroyed. All they had left was the clothes they stood up in.

Nastasia just managed to save the casket from the fire, however. So the next day she said:

"Well, it seems we're at the end of our tether. We shall have to sell the casket."

The two boys both said at once:

"Yes, sell it, Mummy. But see that you get a good price for it."

As for Tanyushka, when the others weren't looking she took out the button. She gazed at it and the green-eyed woman made a sign to her to agree. She felt very sad about it, but what could she do? No matter what happened, her father's keepsake would go to that green-eyed woman. She sighed deeply and said to her mother:

"If we must sell it, sell it." And she didn't even ask to have a last look at the stones. And indeed how could she spread them out and look at them where they were then, taking shelter in a neighbour's house?

Tney had scarcely made up their minds to sell the casket before buyers were on the doorstep. Probably one of them had set the house on fire himself so as to get his hands on the casket. These sort of folk love to get their hands on other people's goods. Seeing that the boys were now grown up they named a much bigger price. One buyer offered five hundred, another seven hundred, another went as high as a thousand. Round about the works that was considered a tidy sum; you could set yourself up on it. All the same Nastasia stuck out for two thousand. The buyers started offering a bit more but they kept it dark from each other, for it was a case of each man for himself. None of 'em, look you, wanted to let go of such a tempting morsel. And while they were bargaining with Nastasia, a new manager came to Polyevsky.

Sometimes managers stayed quite a long time but during those years there were a lot of changes. The Stinking Billy-goat, as they called him—the one who had been there in Stepan's time—had been sent off to Krilatovsk because of his nasty smell. After him came Roasted Bottom—him that the workers put on a mould of molten iron. Then came Severyan the Murderer, and him the Mistress of the Mountain turned into a block of stone. Then there were two or three others like them and finally came this man.

He was a foreigner, they say, and could speak all sorts of foreign tongues, but Russian he spoke badly. The only words he could pronounce properly were "Flog 'em." In a condescending, drawling voice he'd say it: "Flo-og 'em!" Whenever anyone did anything wrong and it was reported to him, he'd always say: "Flog 'em." So 'Flogem' became his nickname.

But actually this Flogem wasn't a bad sort of fellow. He may have shouted a lot, but as for sending the men to the flogging-chamber, he hardly did that at all. The guards who did the flogging had very little work to do in his time. The people had a little breathing-space while Flogem was here.

And how he came to be manager here, look you, is quite a story. The old master had grown old and feeble. He could hardly put one foot in front of the other. And he wanted to marry his son to some

countess or other before he died. But this son of his had a mistress to whom he was very partial. So what was to be done? Very awkward it was. What would the countess's kinsfolk say about it? So the old mine-owner hit on the idea of persuading this woman—this mistress of his son's—to marry a musician. This musician now, he was in the master's employ. He taught the master's children music and foreign languages—as was the custom among people of that station of life.

So the master said to this woman:

"Why do you go on living like this, getting a bad name for yourself? Why don't you get married? I'll give you a dowry, and I'll make your husband manager at Polyevsky. Things are running smoothly there. All he'll have to do is keep the people in order. He has enough sense for that, even though he is a musician. As his wife you can live very well at Polyevsky. The first lady in the place you'll be. Everybody will honour and respect you. What's wrong with that, eh?"

The woman seemed willing to do as he said. Either she'd fallen out with the son or else 'twas just a piece of cunning on her part.

"Yes, indeed," she said, "I have often dreamed of this, but I never dared to speak of it."

The musician, look you, wouldn't agree at first.

"I don't want to marry her," he said. "She's got a bad name. She's nothing but a strumpet."

But the master was a wily old man. Not for nothing had he become a factory owner. And he soon broke the musician in. Whether 'twas done by threats, flattery or liquor is their business, but anyway the wedding soon took place and the young couple went off to live at Polyevsky. So that was how Flogem came to our works. He was not here very long and to give him his due, he wasn't a bad sort of fellow. Later, when Mug-and-a-half came to take his place, the men at the factory wished they had Flogem back again.

Flogem and his wife arrived just at the time when the buyers were coming to Nastasia after the casket. Flogem's wife was something of a beauty too. Fair and rosy—just the kind of woman for a mistress. To be sure, the young master wouldn't have picked an ugly one. He had some experience in these matters, I can tell you! Well, Flogem's wife heard that a casket of jewels was being sold. "I'll go and have a look at it," she said to herself. "Who knows? It might be worth having." And she quickly got ready and drove off to Nastasia's. The factory horses, look you, were always at their service.

"Good day to you, my dear," she said; "show me the precious stones you have to sell."

Nastasia brought out the casket and showed her the jewels. And Flogem's wife's eyes fairly popped out of her head. She'd been brought up in Sam-Peterburk, look you, and had been to foreign parts with the master's son, so she knew a thing or two about jewellery. "What an amazing thing!" she thought to herself. "Why, not even

the Tsarina herself possesses such beautiful stones as these folk at Polveysky who haven't even a house to their head. I must buy them somehow."

"How much do you want for them?" she asked.

"Two thousand roubles," said Nastasia.

"All right then, my dear. Come, get ready; we'll go to my house with the casket and there I'll give you the money."

But Nastasia wouldn't agree to this:

"'Tis not the custom with us for food to go seeking the belly," said she. "Do you bring the money here and then the casket is yours."

The woman saw that Nastasia was the kind you couldn't argue with. She quickly popped off home for the money, saying as she went out:

"Very well then, my dear. But promise me you won't sell the casket till I come back."

And Nastasia replied:

"Have no fear of that. If I give my word about anything, I keep it. I will wait till this evening; after that I'll do as I please."

No sooner had Flogem's wife left, than the traders came back in a bunch. They'd been keeping an eye on her, look you.

"Well, now," they said, "What about it?"

"I've sold the casket," said Nastasia.

"For how much?"

"For the price I said: two thousand."

"What?" shouted the merchants. "Have you lost your wits or something? Do you mean to say you've sold the casket to strangers instead of to us, your friends?" And they offered her a higher price than two thousand.

But Nastasia did not fall for their bait.

"For you there's nothing wrong in going back on your word but I've been brought up otherwise," she said. "I made a promise, and that's an end of the matter."

Flogem's wife hurried back with the money. She handed it to Nastasia, snatched up the casket and was about to start off for home, when she ran into Tanyushka in the doorway. Tanyushka, look you, had been out somewhere and the sale had taken place in her absence. She stared at the strange woman with the casket and stared at her hard—could it be the one she had seen in the malachite hall? And Flogem's wife stared back at her:

"Who is this apparition? Who are her people?" she asked.

"People say she's my daughter," Nastasia replied. "'Twas she who inherited the casket you've just bought. I wouldn't have sold it if I hadn't been so hard pressed. From a tiny mite she loved to play with the jewels. She always used to say how warm they were and how nice to the touch. But what's the use of talking about it. What's lost is lost."

"That's where you're wrong, my dear," said Flogem's wife. "I'll find a nice little nest for these stones." And to herself she thought:

"It's a good thing this green-eyed wench doesn't know how pretty she is. Take the likes of her to Sam-Peterburk, and she'd turn the Tsar's head. I mustn't let my silly young Turchaninov set eyes on her!"

And with that she set off for home.

When she got home Flogem's wife began to brag:

"And now, my good husband, I'll be able to snap my fingers at you—yes, and at Turchaninov too. At the slightest thing it's good-bye to you. Off I'll go to Sam-Peterburk, or, better still, abroad, and sell the casket. Husbands like you I'll be able to buy by the dozen, if I've a mind to."

Boasting and bragging like this, she wanted to show herself off in her new purchases. Up she ran to the looking-glass and the first thing she put on was a headpiece. But, oh dear, what's the matter: she couldn't bear it! The thing pulled and tugged at her hair. She had quite a to-do getting it off. It kept slipping out of her fingers. Then she tried on some earrings and they nearly tore the lobes in two. She put on a ring. It seemed to grip her finger like a vice; she was hard put to it to get it off with soapsuds. Her husband jeered at her: 'twas not for the likes of her to wear the things.

"What can be the matter?" she wondered, "I must go to town and show them to a jeweller. He must put the things right, but I must be careful he doesn't change the stones."

No sooner said than done. Early the next morning she set off for town. It didn't take long in the Works' troika, look you. Having found out who was the best jeweller, she went straight to him. The jeweller was an old, old man, but an expert at his craft. He looked at the casket and asked her where she'd bought it, and she told him all she knew about it. He examined the casket and, without so much as opening it to look at the jewels, said:

"I can't do it for you—no matter what price you'd pay. It's not been made by a local craftsman; it's not possible for us to do work like this."

Flogem's wife couldn't understand the difficulty; she snorted and dashed off to some other jewellers. But 'twas as if they had all agreed among themselves. They examined the casket, admired it, wouldn't so much as look at the stones and refused the job out of hand. So the lady thought she would get the better of them by a trick and said that she'd brought the casket from Sam-Peterburk, and that all the jewels had been made there too. But the craftsman to whom she spun this yarn only laughed:

"I know only too well where this casket was made and I've heard a deal about the craftsman who made it. But we fellows can't hope to vie with the likes of him. No one can do work like his and no one will take on the job. They can only be worn by the person they were made for; they'll fit no one else, do what you will."

The lady couldn't understand what all the trouble was about, but she felt there was something wrong somewhere; the jewellers were

afraid of something. And then she remembered Nastasia had said that her daughter liked to wear the jewels.

"Can it be that green-eyed wench?" she thought. "Here's a fine state of things!"

But then she reflected:

"But after all, what does it matter to me? I can sell the jewels to some rich fool. She can have the discomfort and I can have the money." And she went back to Polyevsky.

When she got there, she heard the news: Old Turchaninov had departed from this world. The old man had tricked her into marrying Flogem, but Death had outwitted even him and struck him down. He was dead before he had married his son off to the countess and now the young man was free to do what he liked. And before much time had passed Flogem's wife received a letter from him. "This and that, Dearest One. In the spring I'll come and take you away from Polyevsky and we'll get rid of your musician somehow." Flogem got to know of this and he kicked up a row. He didn't fancy being made a fool of in public, look you. After all, he was the manager—and yet here they were plotting to steal his wife. He started drinking heavily with his assistants. They were only too glad to oblige, providing he paid for the drinks. One day, during a drinking bout, one of these topers said:

"There's a girl bred and born at our Works here who's such a beauty as you wouldn't find the like of in many a long day."

Flogem asked:

"Who is this girl? Where does she live?"

They told him: "She's of the family from whom your wife bought the casket."

"I'd like to see this girl," said Flogem; and the topers thought out some pretext for going to Nastasia's house.

"Let's go now. We can say we've come to see if the new cottage has been properly built. Though they're a free family, they live on land belonging to the factory. If need be we can apply the screw."

So two or three of them went off with Flogem to Nastasia's house. They took a chain with them and started measuring up to see whether Nastasia had not taken an inch or two off somebody else's plot. In a word they were looking for something to find fault with. The measurements done, they went into the house, and Tanyushka, as it happened, was alone. Flogem stared at her, speechless with admiration. Never, not even on his travels abroad, had he seen such beauty. He stood there like a fool, but she sat there without a word, as if his being there did not concern her. After a while he asked:

"What are you doing?"

"I am working on an order," she replied, holding up her embroidery for him to see.

"Would you take an order from me?" says Flogem.

"Why not, if we agree about the price?"

"Could you embroider a likeness of yourself in silk?"

Tanyushka looked at the button out of the corner of her eye; the woman with the green eyes made a sign for her to take the order, at the same time pointing at herself. She answered:

"I can't do a likeness of myself, but there's a girl I have in mind who's all dressed out with jewels and a dress like a queen—I could do you a likeness of her. But that sort of work would cost you a tidy sum."

"Have no fear about the price. I'll pay a hundred, two hundred roubles, if she's at all like you."

"The face will be like mine, but the dress will be different."

They agreed on a price of a hundred roubles and Tanyushka promised to have the order finished in a month's time. But Flogem, on the pretext of coming to see how the work was going, was constantly in and out of the house, though of course he didn't come about that at all. He'd been smitten by her beauty like the rest of them, look you. But Tanyushka seemed not to realize it. She hardly spoke more than three words to him. And the other topers started bantering Flogem:

"You won't break her down! You're wearing out good shoe-leather for nothing!"

Well, Tanyushka finished the portrait. Flogem looked at it, and there, heavens alive, was herself! Dressed in beautiful clothes she was, and covered in jewellery; but otherwise the likeness was unmistakable. He handed her three hundred-rouble notes, but Tanyushka handed him back two of them.

"'Tis not our way to accept presents," she said. "We live on what we earn and no more."

Flogem went home feasting his eyes on the portrait. He was careful not to show it to his wife, however. He drank less and started to take more interest in the running of the Works.

Then came the spring, and the young Master arrived at Polyevsky. The people were all collected together for prayers and then feasting and dancing began at the Big House. Two casks of liquor were rolled out for the people to drink to the memory of their old master and to the health of the new one; the casks were broached.

The Turchaninovs were adepts at that sort of thing and when you'd drunk a glass of the master's liquor and capped it with ten of your own, you didn't know what kind of a holiday you were celebrating, and when you came to count up the cost, you found you'd spent your last kopeck for nothing.

The next day the people went back to work, but feasting still went on at the Big House. And so it continued: they'd sleep for a while—then back to carousing! Some went boating, others rode in the forest, others strummed away at musical instruments and so on. As for Flogem, he was drunk the whole time. The Master assigned some of the most desperate topers to him and told them to pump it into him

until he dropped. And they were only too glad to be of service to the new master.

Now although Flogem was drunk, he knew what was in the wind all right. And he didn't like being made a fool of in front of the other guests. So one day, while at table, he said out loud before them all:

"What do I care if the Master Turchaninov wants to take my wife from me? Let him take her! I don't want her. I have this girl." And with this he took the silken likeness out of his pocket. Everybody gasped and Flogem's wife sat there open-mouthed. The young Master too stared at it. Curious, he was.

"Who is this girl?" he asked.

Flogem, look you, just laughed:

"If you piled this table with gold, I wouldn't tell you," he said.

But what was the use of saying that, when everyone from the Works recognized Tanyushka's face at once? They all vied with each other to tell the Master about her. Flogem's wife was beside herself:

"What do you mean by talking such nonsense! The very idea of the girl at the Works here having clothes and jewels like that! Why, my husband brought this portrait from abroad. Before our marriage, even, he showed it me. Now he's drunk, there's no knowing what stories he'll be making up. He's all bloated with the drink."

Flogem saw that his wife was angry, but he went on teasing her:

"Shameless One! Shameless One! It's you who are making up stories and throwing dust in the Master's eyes! What portrait have I ever shown you? It was made here; and it was this girl you've been talking about who made it. As to the dress she's wearing—well, I won't lie to you: I don't know. Anyone is free to put on what dress they please. But the jewels were hers, no doubt of it. They're locked up in your cupboard this very minute. You bought them for two thousand roubles, but you couldn't wear them. You can't put a Circassian saddle on a cow! Everyone at the Works knows about this purchase of yours!"

When the Master heard about the jewels, he said:

"Come now, show them to me."

He was a fool and a spendthrift—a typical rich man's heir in a word. He had a passion for precious stones. In himself he had nothing to swagger about—he had neither the face nor the figure, as they say, so he liked to show off his precious stones. And he had only to hear of a valuable jewel to want to buy it.

Flogem's wife saw there was no way out of it, so she went and fetched the casket. The Master took one look at the jewels and said:

"How much?"

Flogem's wife suggested some quite unheard-of sum. The Master bargained with her. They agreed on half that amount, and the Master wrote out a note of hand, not having the money with him. Then he put the casket on the table in front of him and said:

"Go and fetch this girl you've been talking about."

So some of them ran off to find Tanyushka. She came along with them readily, thinking 'twas some big order they had to give. She came into the room, which was full of people, and there in the middle of the throng was the man like a hare whom she'd seen that time. And on the table, in front of the hare, was the casket—her father's gift. Tanyushka saw that it was the Master himself and asked:

"Why did you send for me?"

The Master was too dumbfounded to say a word. He just stared and stared in silence. But at last he found his tongue:

"Are these your jewels?"

"They were ours. But now they are hers." And she pointed at Flogem's wife.

"They are mine now," said the Master proudly.

"That's your business," said Tanyushka.

"If you like I'll make you a present of them."

"I have nothing to give you in return."

"Well, will you put them on? I'd like to see what they look like when worn."

"That I can do," replied Tanyushka.

She took the casket, chose what she wanted—as she'd often done before—and quickly donned the pieces where they belonged. The Master stared and gasped. "Ah! Ah!" And not a word more could he say. Tanyushka stood awhile with the jewels on and asked:

"Have you looked your fill? May I go now? I cannot waste time standing here. I have work to do."

But the Master said in front of all the company:

"Will you marry me? Will you?"

Tanyushka simply smiled:

"It's not befitting a gentleman to say such things," and she took off the jewels and went home. But the Master wouldn't let the matter rest there. The next day he went to see Nastasia and begged and entreated her to let him marry her daughter.

Nastasia said:

"I will not force her. She can do as she pleases. But to my way of thinking 'twould be no fit match."

Tanyushka listened to his suit and then said:

"Listen: I have heard it said that in the Tsar's palace there is a great hall made out of the malachite that my father hewed. If you will show me the Tsarina in that hall, I will marry you, but only on that condition."

Of course the Master agreed to everything. He got ready to go to Sam-Peterburk straight away and wanted Tanyushka to go too, offering her a carriage for the journey. But Tanyushka replied:

"'Tis not our custom for a girl to ride behind her bridegroom's horses. And you and I are not even betrothed. First keep your promise and then we'll talk of it."

"When will you come to Sam-Peterburk then?" he asked her.

"For the Feast of the Intercession. I'll be there without fail. But for the time being you had better go away from here."

So the Master went away. He didn't take Flogem's wife with him. He didn't so much as see her. When he reached his house at Sam-Peterburk he started boasting all over the town about his jewels and his beautiful bride. He showed the casket to many people and they grew curious to see this bride of his. When autumn came he prepared an apartment for Tanyushka and bought all sorts of fine dresses and shoes for her. But one day he got a letter from her saying that she was living at some old widow's house on the outskirts of the city. The Master, of course, immediately rushed to see her.

"How can you think of living in a place like this?" he said, "Why, I've hired an apartment for you. The finest in Sam-Peterburk."

But Tanyushka replied:

"I like it well enough here."

Now stories about Turchaninov's jewels and his beautiful bride had even reached the Tsarina's ears. One day she said:

"Tell Turchaninov to show me this bride of his. I've heard a lot about her."

So the Master rushed round to Tanyushka to tell her to get ready. She must have a fine dress made to go to court and wear the jewels from the malachite casket. Tanyushka replied:

"As to the dress, that's my concern. But I will take the jewels for the occasion. But mind you don't send any carriage to fetch me to the Palace. I'll go in my own way. Just wait for me at the entrance to the Palace, at the foot of the steps."

The Master wondered to himself: "Where will she get a court dress? Where will she get the horses?" But he didn't dare question her further.

So the guests began to arrive at the Palace. They came in their carriages, dressed in beautiful silks and velvets. Young Turchaninov got there early and waited for his bride at the foot of the steps; and others, who were curious to see this bride of his, waited there too. Meanwhile Tanyushka put on the jewels, fastened a kerchief round her head in the way she did at home, threw her sheep-skin coat round her shoulders and set off for the Palace on foot. People who saw her said: "Who on earth is this?" and crowds followed her. At the Palace gates the imperial lackeys refused to let her through:

"Factory-workers aren't allowed here," they said.

Young Turchaninov saw Tanyushka coming in the distance. But he was ashamed to be seen with her dressed in a little sheep-skin coat and coming on foot, and he slunk away. At this moment Tanyushka drew back her coat and what a dress the lackeys saw! None of the Tsarina's could compare with it. And they let her in at once. And when she took off her coat and kerchief, everyone said in amazement:

"Who can it be? She must be queen of some country. Which is it?"

And the Master Turchaninov was there on the spot.

"This is my bride," he said.

But Tanyushka frowned at him:

"We'll see about that afterwards," she said. "Why did you deceive me? Why didn't you wait for me at the Palace steps?"

Turchaninov excused himself as best he could. 'Twas a mistake, he said, very apologetic he was.

So off they went to the imperial hall where they had been ordered to attend. Tanyushka looked around her. This was not the place she had wanted to see. She turned on the Master angrily, saying:

"What trickery is this? I told you to take me to the hall made of the malachite hewn by my father." And she walked through the palace as if she were at home. And counsellors and generals and the rest trooped after her.

"What can it be?" they asked each other, "it seems 'twas in the other hall we were meant to attend."

The hall was crammed with people and not one of them could take their eyes off Tanyushka. And she for her part stood close to one of the malachite pillars and waited. Turchaninov, of course, was beside her. He whispered to her that it was not right; they'd been told to attend in the other hall. But Tanyushka stood there calmly without turning a hair, as if he weren't there at all.

The Tsarina came into the hall where the reception was to be held and found it empty. Her confidants told her that Turchaninov's bride had made everyone go into the malachite hall. Naturally the Tsarina was annoyed. What impudence indeed! She stamped her foot and was quite angry. She went to the malachite hall. Everyone bowed and curtsied to her, everyone except Tanyushka, who did not so much as stir.

The Tsarina called out:

"Come now, show me this impudent one, this bride of Turchaninov's."

Hearing these words, Tanyushka frowned terribly and said to the Master:

"Is this another of your tricks? I told you to show the Tsarina to me and instead of that you arrange to show me to her! Again you have deceived me. I don't want to set eyes on you again. Here, take your jewels."

So saying, Tanyushka leaned against the malachite wall and melted into it. All that remained of her were the sparkling jewels which were stuck to the walls at the places where her head, neck and hands had been.

Of course, everyone got a terrible fright; and the Tsarina fell down in a faint on the floor. Then, when the tumult and confusion had subsided, Turchaninov's friends said to him:

"You'd better take those stones of yours, otherwise they'll get stolen. A Palace isn't like most places, you know. People know what jewels are worth here!"

So Turchaninov set to collecting the stones. But whichever

one he touched turned into a drop of water. Some turned into drops as pure as tears, some into yellowish drops, and some into drops that were thick and red like blood. So he did not get any of the stones back.

He looked down at the floor, and there at his feet lay a button. 'Twas of ordinary bottle glass in a rough setting of wood. There seemed no use in it, but in his distraction he picked it up. And no sooner had he got it in his hand than he saw, as in a great mirror, a green-eyed beauty in a malachite dress, adorned with costly jewels; and she was laughing and saying:

"Oh, you half-witted, cross-eyed hare! Did you think you could marry me! A fine match you'd be for me!"

After this, the Master lost what little wits he ever had. But he didn't part with the button. Sometimes he would look into it and there was the green-eyed beauty laughing at him and mocking him. To drown his grief he took to drink and ran into debt; in his time our Works nearly came under the hammer.

Flogem now, he was dismissed and took to crawling about the pubs. He reduced himself to rags, but he still clung to the silk likeness. What happened to that likeness afterwards no one knows.

Nor did his wife fare any better. 'Tisn't easy to raise money on a note of hand, when all the iron and the copper are mortgaged!

As for Tanyushka herself, she was never seen or heard of since. 'Twas as if she had never been.

Nastasia grieved at losing her, of course, but not inconsolably. For though she was her own flesh and blood, she'd always seemed to Nastasia like a stranger.

Besides, her sons had grown up by now, and had married. They'd had children and the house was as full as could be. What with seeing to this one and looking after that one there was scarcely a moment to spare. So it didn't leave her much time for grieving!

As for the bachelors, they took longer to forget Tanyushka. They still walked past her window, hoping she might look out. But she never did.

Of course, in due time they, too, got married, but she would sometimes come into their minds.

"Ah, what a girl that was we had at the Works here! We won't see the like of her again in our lifetime."

Afterwards another strange thing happened. 'Twas said that the Mistress of the Copper Mountain had a double; people had seen two girls in malachite dresses walking about together.

THE TWO LIZARDS

THE POLEVSKY COPPER-SMELTING WORKS, SO I'VE HEARD TELL, WERE started by the government. There hadn't been any smelting works in these parts up till then. The building of them wasn't carried through without a fight—you know what the government is. They sent soldiers here and put up Gorny Shchit village to guard the roads for them.

At Gumyoshevsky, now, in those days you could find ore on the surface, which was what they were after, look you. And of course they got what they wanted. They drove people there and put up a works and brought a lot of Germans along to run it. But somehow they couldn't make it pay. Try as they would they couldn't. Whether the Germans wouldn't show them, or whether they didn't know how to run it themselves, I don't know, but Gumyoshevsky turned out a failure. They tried extracting ore from the other mine but it wasn't even worth the labour involved. The mine was useless, exhausted. You can't establish a smelting works on a mine like that. And so it was that our Polevsky works fell into Turchaninov's hands.

Before this, Turchaninov had been in the salt business and traded on Stroganov land, and also went in a little for copper. He owned a small smelting-works, a wretched little affair not much better than a peasants' handicraft shop. They just piled the ore into heaps and roasted it and boiled it and reboiled it and Turchaninov made a profit on it. And Turchaninov, look you, gloated over this profit.

When he heard that things were going badly at the government copper-smelting works, he set off to ask if he might buy it. "We are experienced in copper-smelting," he said, "we can make it pay."

The Demidovs and others of the richer and better known manufacturers were not interested. "If the Germans couldn't make it pay, it can't be any good. 'Twould only be a loss," they thought. So Turchaninov got hold of our works and Sisert into the bargain. Such a rich business, too, and all for nothing.

Turchaninov came to Polevsky and brought his skilled men. Of course he promised them this and that. Being a merchant, he knew how to get the better of people. Indeed he could twist anyone round.

"Look here, old friends," he said, "if you'll do your best for me, I promise you that as long as I live I'll . . ."

Well, he sang all sorts of honeyed words to them. He'd been at that game since boyhood, so it came easily to him now. And he didn't forget to slip in a word about the Germans either.

"Surely you can do better than those Germans."

The old men didn't particularly fancy the idea of leaving their homes, but this reference to the Germans, look you, touched them on a sore spot. They didn't like to seem inferior to Germans. The Germans gave themselves enough airs as it was, and had a way of

looking down on our craftsmen as if they were not human, and this angered our old men. They looked over the works and saw that it was better built than their own place: naturally, the government had built it! Then they went to Gumyoshevsky to have a look at the ore there. And then they said straight out: "The men who were here before were fools. Why, with ore like this and furnaces like these, we could double our present output. Providing, that is, there's plenty of salt available, as at home."

'Twas a special device they had, look you. They smelted the ore mixed with salt. And on this they set their hopes. Turchaninov had confidence in his skilled men, so he dismissed the Germans, saying:

"We shan't need you any more."

And the Germans, what could they do, if the boss dismissed them? So they began to make ready; some to go home, others to jobs at other works. But they were puzzled by one thing, which was how could simple peasants cope with so big a task. So they got hold of three men who'd been working under them and said to them:

"Keep your eyes open and see whether these peasants have a special method. Find out what it is they're relying on and what they do first. If you do find out anything let us know and we'll pay you for it."

One of these men whom the Germans had tried to bribe was an honest kind of fellow. He went to the craftsmen and told them all about it. The craftsmen in turn went to Turchaninov and said:

"'Twould be better if you only employed men from our own parts at the smelting works here. Otherwise look what happens. If you take a stranger, who knows but that he may have come from the Germans. Surely 'tis to your interest that our device with the salt should not become known."

Naturally, Turchaninov agreed, the more so as he had a device of his own about which he said nothing to the men. "This suits me very well," he thought.

In those days, look you, Demidov and the other manufacturers round here employed all sorts of runaways, Bashkirs, Old Believers and so forth. They were cheaper, and as they had not to answer for them, they could treat them as they pleased. But Turchaninov reckoned otherwise:

"If you pick up men from the highways and byways and afterwards cannot manage them, 'twill be so much the worse for you," he thought. "Runaways are a knowing lot; they'll put each other up to tricks. The Baskhirs, too, speak a different tongue and have a different faith; 'twill be hard to keep them in order. 'Twould be better to induce men I know to come here from a distance with their families. A man wouldn't want to run away from his family. Things would be quiet, and when I had them firmly in my hands we'd see who would benefit most from the change! And as for runaways, Bashkirs and the like, they must not be allowed to come near."

And so it came about. At our works, we're all of the same religion. At Tagil now, where I was once, there's no accounting the different faiths, but with us you never so much as hear of anyone belonging to another faith. And there are no foreigners here either —apart from the management. To cut a long story short they were all dismissed.

So this suggestion of the master-smelter's played right into Turchaninov's hands. And he began to persuade them:

"Thank you, old friends, for your good counsel," he said, "I will never forget how you helped me. All shall be done as you suggest. I will close the old works and bring everyone here instead. And do you look round and see which of the workers are the more reliable and I'll either buy them out or engage them for a term. Help me to carry out my plan and in return I'll. . . ."

And as before, he promised them everything under the sun. He didn't grudge anything. Treated them to drinks, gave them a feast and himself ate and drank and danced with them. In short, he got round the old men.

And the old fellows went back home praising everything:

"'Tis a fertile district, there are plenty of houses, the ore is rich and it looks as though earnings would be good. The master is a homely sort of man. He came and drank with us and didn't stand on ceremony at all. One can work for a man like that."

And Turchaninov's servants went about everywhere and caught the people by words such as these. They collected enough people not only for copper-smelting but for other work as well. Most of them they engaged for a term but some they bought out from their owners completely. 'Twas the time of serfdom, look you, when men and women were bought and sold like cattle.

Turchaninov did not delay but had the men and their families moved to the new works, to our Polevsky here, that very same summer. The way back, of course, was completely cut off. To say nothing of those who'd been bought outright, those engaged for a term couldn't go back either. They were charged for the removal a sum so large that they couldn't hope to pay it back in a lifetime. And who would willingly go away and leave his family in the lurch? His family, his own flesh and blood. Turchaninov planted these people here and bound them as with iron chains to the place, the whole lot of them.

Of the men employed at the smelting-works before, the only one who remained was the young fellow who told them about the Germans' treachery. Turchaninov would have sent him down the mine, too, but one of his crafstmen counselled against it:

"What are you thinking of? The lad has done us a service. He must be taught to work along with us. Seems he has a head on his shoulders."

Then he asked the young fellow:

"What work did you do when you were with the Germans?"

"I was a Stenbukher," he answered.

"What's that in our language?"

"The one who looks after the crushers—pounding and sifting the ore."

"That's an easy job, plumping things into sieves," said the craftsman. "Anybody can do that. But do you know how the Germans filled the smelters?"

"No," said the young fellow. "They wouldn't let us Russians come near. They had their own people with them. We only had to drag the stuff over to whoever wanted it. But I noticed a few things when doing this. I wanted to learn. And I noticed a few things in the refinery too. But they wouldn't let us anywhere near the smelters."

The craftsman heard what he had to tell and said:

"I'll take you on as my assistant. I'll teach you how to do the work and in return you can show me anything useful you learned from the Germans."

So this young fellow—Andriukha was his name—was put to work at the furnaces. He soon got used to it and before long was as skilled a workman as the craftsman himself.

Two years passed and Polevsky became quite different from what it had been in the Germans' time. The output of copper ore increased enormously. Gumyoshevsky had begun to rumble and its fame was spreading all over the world. Naturally, many more people came to Polevsky, all drawn from three districts where Turchaninov had had small manufacturing concerns. There were a great many at the smelting furnaces, but even more at the mine. Turchaninov showed himself very eager to make a lot of money. No matter how much he made he could always find room for it. He grew richer and richer in front of your eyes. The Stroganovs became quite envious and lodged a complaint with the authorities. They claimed that the Gumyoshevsky mine was on their land, that it should never have been given to Turchaninov, that it ought to be taken away from him and returned to them, the Stroganovs. But during these years Turchaninov had become a power, hob-nobbing with princes and counsellors. He managed to get the better of the Stroganovs. What can avail against money?

Naturally Turchaninov's workpeople had a hard time of it, and the master-smelters were angry too at the way they'd been deceived. At the beginning, when they were getting the place going, Turchaninov had been all honey in his treatment of them, saying: "Bear with it a little, old friends! Moscow wasn't built in a day. Once we've got this works going properly, I'll make things much easier for you."

Easier indeed! As time went on things got worse and worse. At the mine the men were being flogged to death and at the works the officials were getting more and more savage. They even struck the best of the master-smelters in the face, saying:

"Don't count on the fact that you showed us your way of smelting.

We have a better method now. We'll tell the master, and he'll show you!"

By this time everybody was calling Turchaninov 'the master.' It was 'The master this' and 'The master that' just as if he had no other name. He never came near the works now. He had no time: too busy counting his money, he was.

So those craftsmen who had persuaded the people to move to Polevsky said:

"We must go direct to the master himself. To be sure, he's a gentleman now, but he's an easy going sort of man. We've not forgotten how he drank with us that day. Let us go now and talk frankly to him."

So they all set off for Turchaninov's house, but the servants would not allow them to see him.

"The master's drunk his coffee and gone to sleep," they said. "Go back to your places at the furnaces and work well."

The men were indignant.

"Asleep? At midday? What next? Wake him up! Tell him the men want to speak to him!"

At these words, the master rushed out. He had woken up, it seemed. And with him was a whole pack of armed guards. But this furnace-worker, Andriukha, was young and hot-tempered; he was not afraid, not he, and he shouted louder than the rest, reproaching the master for this and that. He finished by saying:

"Have you forgotten about the salt? Where would you be but for the salt?"

"Forget the salt!" said the master. "How could I? Guards, seize this man. Flog him and salt him thoroughly. It will improve his memory."

And they also seized some others whom the master pointed out. 'Twas said he was a crafty man. He didn't go to it the government way. He chose his victims carefully, by design, so as to spare his own pocket. Though he never went near the works himself, his spies kept him informed about the doings of every man. So the bolder of the men, those who were most free in their speech, were flogged, but the quieter ones were let off with a caution.

"Mark my words. You'll get the same if you don't work properly!"

Well, this scared them and they worked twice as hard as before and were always on the look-out to see that no mistakes were made. But there were not enough skilled men there, so how could there fail to be mistakes . . . ? One by one, the old master craftsmen themselves were set upon, and the one who had taught Andriukha was killed outright. They flogged the old man to death. And after that they put Andriukha in his place.

At first he did quite well and showed himself an excellent craftsman. The best in the whole works he was. And Turchaninov's creatures were satisfied and called him 'Salty' in jest. But he didn't mind this; and even joked about it himself:

"Salt makes the meat more tasty," he'd say.

And when they had complete trust in him he very cleverly blocked up two of the furnaces. He froze them so hard that it couldn't have been worse.

Of course, he was seized, flung into the mine and chained up there. The miners got to hear of it and did their best to set him free, but nothing came of their efforts. Guards were posted to keep a careful eye on everyone so that it was quite impossible to come near him.

Chained up in a mine, a man didn't take long to lose his health. Not even the strongest could stand it. The food was bad; water they sometimes brought, sometimes not, so you had to drink mine water. And mine water is very bad for the heart.

He languished there for six months, for twelve, and then broke down completely. He became nothing but a shadow and so weak he couldn't work. Even the mine overseer said: "Have patience; things will soon be easier for you. If need be we can dig you in down here without any fuss."

'Twas burying him he meant, look you. And Andriukha himself saw that he was in a bad way. And he was young and did not want to die.

"Ekh," he thought, "all this talk about a Mistress of the Mountain who helps people is just fiddlesticks! If there were such a woman, wouldn't she have come to my help? She must have seen the way they're murdering me down here. Mistress of the Mountain indeed! Idle rubbish people make up for their own consolation."

So thinking, he dropped to the ground where he stood. He fell with a splash into a puddle. The water down the mine was very cold, but it was all the same to him—he didn't even notice it. The end had come.

How long he lay there he did not know, but he felt quite warm. He seemed to be lying on grass with a light breeze playing over him and the hot sun baking and baking him, just as at haymaking time.

He lay quite still and thought:

"I'm dreaming about the sun before I die."

But it grew hotter and hotter. He opened his eyes, and he could hardly believe what he saw: he was not in the stope but on a wooded hill. There were tall pine trees and thinnish grass and smallish pieces of dark sandstone. On his right, almost touching his hand, was an immense rock like a wall and higher than the pine trees.

Andriukha touched himself to see if he were awake. He touched the rock and pulled up some grass, scraped one foot against the other —his feet were eaten into by the dirt. Seemingly he was not asleep and the dirt was the ordinary dirt of the mine. But the chains on his legs were gone.

"They must have dragged me up for dead," he thought, "and taken off my chains and left me lying here, but the rest has revived me. What shall I do? Run away or wait and see what happens? I wonder who can have dragged me here?"

He looked round and there by the rock stood a pitcher, with some pieces of bread by it. At the sight of this Andriukha cheered up:

"My mates must have brought me here. They didn't think I was dead for they've left me food and drink. When it's dark they'll come to see how I am, I expect, and then I shall hear what happened."

He ate up the bread to the last crumb and drained the pitcher, but couldn't make out what sort of drink it was: it wasn't intoxicating yet it stimulated him. After he had eaten and drunk he felt in the best of health. He could have lain in that spot for ages. But he kept thinking:

"What shall I do? It will be all right if my mates come, but supposing the officials get here first! I must take a look round and see where I am. If only I could get a bath and some proper clothes!"

In a word, he began to worry. A living man thinks about living things—that's only natural. He climbed up to the top of the rock and saw down below the Gumyoshevsky mine and the works alongside, and he could even see people walking about, like tiny flies. This gave him quite a fright—suppose they were to see him! So he scrambled down from the rock and sat down in his old place, thinking. Lizards were running to and fro. A great many of them, of every colour. Two in particular caught his attention. They were both green; one was large and the other a little smaller.

And the lizards scuttered about, darting in and out of the grass as if they were playing a game. 'Twas plain they were enjoying the sunshine too. Andriukha was so engrossed in watching them that he did not notice a large cloud approaching. Presently a few drops of rain began to fall and most of the lizards ran to take shelter. But the two green ones took no notice of the rain, and went on chasing each other; quite near Andriukha they were too. But presently the rain became heavier and they ran under the stones. In went their little heads and they vanished.

Andriukha was amused by this. As for himself, he didn't take shelter from the rain. 'Twas a warm day and it was only a passing shower. He took off his clothes.

"At least the rain will wash the dirt off," he thought, and he spread his rags out on the ground.

The rain ceased and the lizards came out again. They darted about here and there and were quite dry. But Andriukha was feeling cold now. It was getting on for evening and the sunshine was not as warm as it had been. And he thought:

"How nice if a man could do the same. Poke his head under a stone and there be at home."

And he laid his hands on the big rock from which he had looked at Gumyoshevsky. He didn't press at all heavily—just gave it a slight push at the base. But the rock swayed towards him as if it were going to fall on him. Andriukha jumped aside and the rock returned to its former position.

"What a strange thing!" he said to himself, "a huge rock like that, and it's almost toppling over. It nearly crushed me."

All the same he went up close and examined the rock all round. There were no cracks in it and it seemed deeply embedded in the earth. He pressed against it, first in one spot, then in another. The rock was solid enough, to be sure. Had it really moved?

"It must have been an attack of giddiness due to my sickness," he thought. "'Twas just imagination." And he sat down in his old place.

The two lizards ran up. One of them pushed its little head against the place Andriukha had touched. The rock swayed and along the whole of that side a crack appeared. The lizard darted in and the crack vanished. The second lizard ran to the other end of the rock and stayed quite still as if on guard, while it looked at Andriukha as much as to say:

"It's bound to come out here; there is no other way."

A short while passed and then once again a narrow crack appeared in the base of the rock and gradually grew wider. The first lizard poked its head out again, this time from beneath the other end of the rock, and looked to see where the other, the second lizard, was. But the second one pressed close against the rock and didn't move. Then all of a sudden it leaped on to the first one's back, "Caught you," it seemed to be saying, and its little eyes gleamed merrily. After that they both ran off and the next instant they vanished from sight. 'Twas just as if they'd been trying to show Andriukha where to go and where to come out.

He examined the rock again. No, there wasn't the slightest sign of any crack in it.

"Well, I'll try again," he thought.

He pressed against the rock at the place where he'd pressed before and as he did so the rock swayed right over him. But Andriukha didn't perceive this, for he was looking downwards now. He could see a staircase and, look you, 'twas an elegant staircase such as you might find in a gentleman's new house. Andriukha set his foot on the topmost stair when the two lizards darted in front of him, as if to show him the way. He went down two more steps but still held on to the rock, thinking:

"If I let go, the crack may close up again, and what should I do in the dark?"

He stopped and the two lizards stopped and looked at him, as if they were waiting. Then the thought crossed his mind:

"It must be that the Mistress of the Mountain is testing my courage. 'Tis said that is what she does first."

So he made up his mind and went forward boldly, and when his head was below the opening he let go of the rock. The rock closed up and below it was as though the sun had risen: everything could be clearly seen.

Andriukha looked down and there in front of him were stone

folding doors with beautiful decorations on them, and to the right a single door. The lizards went up to this little door, as if to say: "This is where you must go."

He opened the door and found himself in a bath-house. It was properly furnished but everything was made of stone. There was a sweating-bench and a trough and a ladle and all the rest of it. And a leafy birch brush, too. And 'twas so hot that he had to cover his ears with his hands. Andriukha was overjoyed. The first thing he did was to take off his rags and lay them on the hot stones to dry. But no sooner had he taken them off than they disappeared somewhere. And spread on the shelves were new shirts and on the pegs was hanging clothing of all kinds—gentlemen's clothing, merchants' clothing and clothing worn by working men. But Andriukha did not stop to look at them. He climbed on to the sweating-bench and beat himself so vigorously with the birch brush that it was quite soaked. Having steamed himself to his heart's content he sat up to rest. Then he put on the clothing of a workman such as he was used to. When he came out of the bath-house the lizards were waiting for him at the big door.

He opened the door and heavens, what a sight! In front of him was an enormous hall such as he could not have imagined even in his wildest dreams. The walls were faced with ornate stone and in the middle was a table, laden with all kinds of food and drink. Andriukha had been feeling hungry for some time, look you. So he didn't stop to think but just sat down at the table. The food was ordinary food, but he couldn't make out what the drink was. It was like what he had drunk from the pitcher. Strong but not intoxicating.

Andriukha ate and drank as much as if he were at a grand feast or a wedding. Then he bowed to the lizards and said:

"Thank you for your hospitality, kind hostesses!"

And the lizards were sitting on a high bench nodding their little heads as if to say:

"Good health to you, kind guest! Good health to you!"

After that one of the lizards—the smaller one—jumped down from the bench and ran to the other side of the hall. Andriukha followed her and she led him to a bed, and stopped in front of it, as if to say: "Now lie down and sleep!" The bed was so sumptuously furnished that at first he was afraid to touch it. However he overcame his fear and lay down on it and at once fell asleep. And in the same instant the light went out.

Meanwhile the overseer of Gumyoshevsky mine had the shock of his life. He had gone down to the stope in the morning to see if the prisoner were still alive but there was nothing there except the chain. The overseer was in a terrible state and ran here and there.

"Where can he have got to?" he asked himself. "Whatever shall I do?"

He rushed this way and that, but without finding any trace of the missing man or knowing whom to blame for his disappearance. He

was afraid to tell the management because he would be held responsible; they would say he had not been keeping his eyes open. So the overseer decided to pull down the roof of the stope. 'Twasn't easy to do, but he managed somehow, undermining the walls here and caving in the roof there. After that he went and told the officials.

The officials, of course, were pretty ignorant about mining affairs, so they believed him.

"The roof fell in," he told them. "Crushed the man so thoroughly all you can see of him is the chain."

And naturally he added:

"There's no sense in digging him out. The roof isn't safe and all the good ore there was extracted long ago—and anyway what does it matter to a corpse where it's buried?"

The miners suspected some kind of trick, but they held their tongues.

"He was at death's door anyway," they thought. "We could have done nothing for him."

So the officials told the master:

"That fellow, Salty, who let the furnaces get cold has been crushed by a cave-in."

The master, now, was not slow to use even this incident to his own advantage.

"The Lord himself has punished him," he said. "We must tell the priests about this and they can hold it up as a warning of what happens to people who disobey their master."

So the priests made a noise about it, and the people were told that Andriukha had been crushed by a collapsing roof. They were sorry, of course.

"He was a nice lad," they said, "there are not many such left."

And Andriukha meanwhile? After his bath he slept and slept. He was warm and the bed was soft. He slept a day, two days, then he turned over on the other side and slept some more. And when at last he did wake up he felt fit and well as though he'd never been ill and never been down the mine. He looked round, and there was the table again, laden with food and the two lizards sitting on the bench and watching him.

Andriukha ate and drank and bowed to the lizards and said:

"It wouldn't be amiss now to thank the master, Turchaninov, for his hospitality. To give him a present that would make him sneeze till the tears came."

One of the lizards, the smaller one, jumped down from the bench and ran off. Andriukha followed her and she led him to another door. He opened it and saw another staircase, leading upwards. On the ceiling was a brass knob, a sort of handle. Naturally Andriukha realized what this was for. He walked up the stairs, pulled the handle and an opening appeared. Andriukha stepped out on the hill and the time, he could see, was getting on for evening; the sun was setting.

"That's just what I wanted," he thought. "When it gets dark I'll walk to the mine. Perhaps I'll meet someone who can tell me how things are going there."

He went on quietly, taking care that the wrong sort of person should not see him, and when he reached the mine he hid behind a juniper bush. There were plenty of people about, but the right opportunity was lacking. Either they were in groups or they were people he didn't want to see. And it had grown quite dark.

But after a while a man came along by himself and passed quite close to the bush where Andriukha was hiding. He was a simple young fellow but one Andriukha could trust. They had worked at the furnaces together and he had also been sent down the Gumyoshevsky mine. So Andriukha called out to him in a low voice:

"Mikhailo! Come here."

Mikhailo went in the direction the voice came from and then stopped and asked:

"What do you want?"

"Come here I say."

Mikhailo came closer but seemed to be afraid of something. So Andriukha poked his head out from behind the bush to let him see who it was. Mikhailo let out a shriek and ran for his life. And as it happened a woman came by just then. She, also, saw Andriukha and uttered an ear-splitting shriek:

"Oi, little father, a ghost! A ghost!"

Mikhailo, too, shouted:

"I've seen Andriukha Salty! As he was before he went down the mine, over yonder behind that juniper bush."

The people were alarmed. Some came running up from the mine, with the officials at their head. Others said: "Let us go and see what this practical joke is about." A crowd collected and Andriukha was at a loss what to do.

"If I show myself, goodness knows what the crowd may not do to me," he thought.

So he went deeper into the forest. The crowd were afraid to follow him there. They talked by the juniper bush for a while and then dispersed.

Then Andriukha had an idea. He skirted Gumyoshevsky, going through the forest straight to the copper-smelting works. People who saw him were terrified, threw down their tools and fled. The night overseer climbed on to the roof in his fright; and when they brought him down the next morning he was almost out of his wits. And Andriukha went on to the furnaces and again cooled off the molten ore, and then went on to the master's house.

The master, of course, had heard about Andriukha's ghost being seen. He sent messengers to fetch the priests but they could not be found. So he shut himself up in his house and gave orders that nobody be admitted. Andriukha saw that he wouldn't be able to get in, so he went back to his place, to the beautiful hall, thinking.

"You wait! You shall remember that salt yet."

The next morning—commotion at the works! All the furnaces blocked up—'twas no laughing matter! The master was weeping and wailing. And at Gumyoshevsky, too, there was trouble. They'd been ordered to exhume Andriukha's body and give it to the priests. "We'll give him a proper church burial and then his ghost won't walk any more," they thought.

They removed the rubble from the caved-in roof, but the body was not there. Only the chain was found; the ankle rings were quite whole and had not been filed off. So they summoned the mine overseer. At first he tried to wriggle out of it, putting the blame on the miners, but in the end he told them how it had been. And when the master heard the truth, what a change there was! He blustered and roared:

"If he's still alive, seize him!"

And he sent out all his guards and servants to search the forest.

Andriukha didn't know about this and when evening came he went out to the hill as before. Pleasant as it was in the underground hall, 'twas pleasanter still on the hill. And he sat by the rock, wondering how he could see his friends. Yes, and there was a girl on his mind.

"She too must think me dead to be sure, I wonder if she wept for me a little?"

As it happened, a party of women were coming through the forest. They had been haymaking or something, or perhaps were out late picking berries. . . . Many people pass through the forest in summer. They passed quite close to the hill where Andriukha was. He could hear them singing and afterwards he caught snatches of their conversation.

One of them said:

"Tasyutka got a start when she heard about Andriukha. They say he's alive."

And another said:

"To be sure he's alive if he blocked up the furnaces."

"Well, what's Tasyutka going to do? Is she going to look for him?"

"Tasyutka is a fool. Yesterday no matter what you said to her she believed what her old people told her. She's scared that Andriukha's ghost will appear at her window. Yet she does nothing but weep all the time."

"She's a fool right enough. She doesn't deserve a boy like that. If I had one like him I wouldn't be scared of him, alive or dead."

Hearing this, Andriukha longed to see who it was running down his Tasyutka. And he wondered: "Couldn't I get them to take a message to her?"

He walked towards the voices and saw a bunch of girls he knew. But he couldn't very well call out to them. There were a lot of other

people about, look you, and small children as well. So how could he appear before them?

He stood and watched them for some time, but didn't show himself, and then he went back to the hill.

He sat down in the old place and fell to brooding. But while he was walking back, one of the master's watchdogs had spotted him and quietly given the signal to the rest. They surrounded the hill, gloating. And their chief called out:

"Seize him!"

Andriukha saw men running towards him from all sides. So he pressed the rock and vanished within. The guards and servants came racing up—he'd disappeared! "Where ever could he have got to?" And they started trying to push the rock aside. They panted and pushed. As if they could move it, indeed! And when they thought it over, they were again seized with fright.

"It really must be a ghost, if it can go through solid rock," they said.

And they ran off to tell the master. The master positively quaked with fear.

"I have to go to Sisert," he said. "Urgent business there. You must catch him without me. If you don't catch him there'll be trouble for you."

And with this parting threat, he jumped on a horse and galloped off to Sisert. His servants didn't know what to do. The only thing they could think of was to keep watch on the hill. And down underneath the rock Andriukha, too, was wondering: "Whatever shall I do? I'm not used to sitting about doing nothing, but I can't go out for if they see me they'll be sure to keep the place under watch." He thought things over for a while and then decided:

"I'll try at night-time. Maybe I can get away when it's dark, afterwards we'll see what happens."

Having decided on this, he wanted to make up a bundle of food to take with him for the road, but the lizards were not there. He did not like to take anything in their absence, 'twas as though he were stealing it.

"O well," he thought, "I can manage without. So long as I'm alive I'll get food somehow."

He took a last look round the beautiful hall, admiring its furnishings and said:

"I thank this home, yet must set out for another!"

At that moment the Mistress appeared to him, as became her. The young man was stunned by her beauty! But the Mistress said to him:

"There is no longer a way out up there. You must go by a different road. Do not worry about food. You shall have as much as you wish—you deserve it. The road will take you where you want to be. Go through those doors yonder but mind you don't look back. You won't forget?"

"I'll not forget," he said, "Thank you for all your kindness."

He bowed to her and went towards the doors, but there by the doors was another girl, the very image of the first, but even more beautiful. Andriukha couldn't resist turning round to see if the first one was still there. She shook her finger at him and said:

"What, have you forgotten your promise?"

"I did forget," he said. "My wits deserted me."

"Ekh, you," she said, "and they call you 'Salty'! Proved yourself a man in every way, yet when it comes to girls you're as weak as a feather. What am I to do with you now?"

"As you please," said he.

"Well, this once I will pardon you. But see that you don't look back a second time or evil will befall you."

Andriukha walked towards the door and the second girl opened it for him. There was a long passage outside. It was quite light but he couldn't see the end of it.

Whether Andriukha looked back a second time and where the passage led him—that our old folk didn't tell me. Nobody has ever seen him in these parts again, but the people have never forgotten him.

"That was a fine lad for you," they say. "Salty they called him. He salted Turchaninov all right!"

As for Turchaninov's servants, they went on watching the rock for a long time, look you. Day and night they stood around it. People used to come up the hill specially to have a look at the fools. Finally they themselves got sick of it. They tried to blow the rock up with explosives. They made the miners do it. Well, they blew it up, of course, but the master went away for the occasion; he was scared. Before he went he raged at his men:

"While you've been standing guard over an empty stone, goodness knows what damage they've done at the works at Gumyoshevsky. For one thing they've roasted the manager's bottom. Whatever is the good of you!"

THE STONE FLOWER

NOT ONLY THE MRAMOR WORKERS WERE FAMED FOR THEIR STONE-carving. At our works, too, 'twas said, were men adept in the art. But there was this difference: our fellows nearly always worked in malachite, which was plentiful and of the highest quality—no better to be found anywhere. And out of this malachite they made some very proper things—such things, look you, that people wondered where they could have learned the art.

In those days there was a master craftsman named Prokopich. The very best, he was, in this craft. No one else could compare with him in skill. But he was getting on in years.

So one day the master told his steward to apprentice some boys to this Prokopich to learn the craft from him.

"Make him teach them all he knows," he said.

But either Prokopich did not like parting with the secrets of his craft, or maybe 'twas some other reason; anyway he proved a very bad teacher. With him it was all cuffs and cursings. He'd raise bumps all over a boy's head and nearly wring his ears off for him and then go and grumble to the steward:

"That lad you sent me is no good. He hasn't got the eye for it and he's clumsy. You could never make a craftsman out of him."

And the steward, who had been told to humour the old man a bit, would say:

"Well, if he's no good, he's no good, and that's all there is to it. We'll just have to get you someone else." And he'd send him another boy.

Well, the lads hereabouts got wind of Prokopich's ways, so well beforehand they'd start howling and begging not to be sent to him. Naturally, the mothers and fathers were none too anxious, either, to send their children to such torment and ill-treatment and they did their best to shield them from going. And besides, 'twas an unhealthy job, this malachite carving. Downright poisonous, in fact. So everyone tried to keep away from it.

Still, the steward bore the master's orders in mind: to apprentice some boys to Prokopich. And Prokopich would wo rry each lad out of his wits almost and then take him back to the steward and say:

"This one is no good either."

This went on for some time until at last the steward was quite beside himself:

"How much longer is this going on? No good, no good and no good. . . . When will there be one that is good? Teach this one."

But Prokopich only replied:

"What's it to me? If I were to teach him for ten years nothing would come of this one."

"Well, who else shall I send you then?"

"You needn't send me anyone for all I care. . . . I shan't be lonely for lack of them."

In this way a whole succession of boys passed through the steward's and Prokopich's hands and it was always the same story: all the benefit a boy got out of it was bumps on his head and all he had inside his head was wondering how to get away. Some of the boys even used to spoil their work on purpose—anything to make Prokopich drive them away.

And so we come to Danilo the Starveling. He was an orphan, this boy, look you, about twelve at the time. Perhaps more. A tall lanky child, but thin as thin can be—so thin 'twas a wonder how he kept any life in him. But his face was nice and clean-looking, and he had curly hair and blue eyes, so he was taken on as a page at the

master's house to hand snuff-boxes or handkerchiefs, or run here and there on errands.

The only trouble was that the orphan lad hadn't any aptness for this sort of thing. Other youngsters in similar places are as quick as lightning at the job. At the slightest sign they are standing smartly before the master with a "What are your orders, sir?" But Danilo would get into a corner, fix his eyes on some picture or ornament and stand staring at it. They'd call for him all over the house and he'd never so much as stir.

They thrashed him for it at first, of course, but after a while they washed their hands of him:

"A Christ's fool," they said. "And lazy! He'll never make a good servant."

Still, they didn't send him to the foundry or down the mines. What with the damp there and everything he wouldn't have lived a week. Instead the manager put him to being a herd-boy.

And here he turned out to be no good at all. It seemed as though he tried to do his best, yet everything went wrong. He always seemed to be thinking of something else; he'd sit staring at a blade of grass or a weed while the cows would be well away over yonder. The old cowherd was the mildest and kindest of men and pitied the poor orphan boy, but there were times when even he would curse.

"What's to become of you, Danilo? You'll ruin yourself and bring my old back to a flogging by your queer ways. Now what sort of behaviour is this? What do you think of all the time?"

"I don't know myself, Grandfather. Nothing in particular. A tiny insect was creeping over a leaf; 'twas dove-coloured, but peeping out from under its wings was a spot of yellow and the leaf was broad with jagged turned up edges showing the darker side, and the middle was bright green, so bright you'd think it had only just been painted. And the little blue insect went creeping along."

"What a fool you are, indeed! Is it your business how an insect's made? It crawls, so let it crawl. Your job is to watch the cows. You just mind what I say now and put all this rubbish out of your head, else I'll tell the steward."

One thing, though, Danilo was good at. He learned to play the horn in a way the old fellow could never dream of. You'd think 'twas proper music. In the evening when the cows were driven home, the wenches and women would beg him:

"Play us a tune, Danilushko, do!"

He'd start to play. And his tunes were tunes they'd never heard before. Now 'twas the whispering woods, now 'twas the purling stream and the birds calling; and very nice it all came out, too. The women grew fond of Danilushko all because of those tunes of his; one would mend his things for him, another would spare him a length of linen to wind around his feet and legs, another would make him a new shirt. . . . As for food and drink, he always had that, it went without saying; each one tried to give him plenty, the tastiest they had.

These tunes were after the old herdsman's heart, too. And 'twas this that brought down misfortune on both of them. Danilushko would forget everything while he was playing—as though there was never a cow to mind. And that same playing brought him misfortune.

He must have gone on playing a good while, and the old herdsman drowsed off a bit. Some of the cows strayed away from the herd. When they were calling the herd home that evening they looked and saw that this one and that one were missing. They hurried off to look for them. But find them indeed if you can! They'd been grazing the herd near Elnichnaya, a lonely out-of-the-way spot, a place wolves used to haunt. So they found only one cow. They drove the herd home and told their tale. People from the works, too, went out in search of the cows, but they found none.

What the punishment was in those days everyone knows. For every fault you had to bare your back. The worst of it was that this time one of the lost cows was from the steward's own farmyard. No need to look for mercy from him. First they stretched out the old fellow, then they came to Danilo, thin and puny as he was. The master's flogger even interceded for the boy:

"He'll melt away at the first blow, and I shouldn't wonder if he gave up the ghost altogether."

Still he gave Danilo a blow and didn't spare him. But never a cry did the boy let out. The man gave him another—he held his tongue, a third—still there was not a whimper out of him. This made the flogger mad, and he laid on with all his might, shouting:

"I'll thrash all that out of you, dumb as you are! You'll give tongue yet! You will, I warrant you!"

Danilushko was trembling from head to foot, tears were rolling down his face, but never a whimper came from him. He bit his lip and braced himself. And at last he went limp without anyone hearing a word from him. The steward—he was there all the time of course—was astonished.

"There's a patient fellow we've found at last! Now I know what to do with him, if he pulls through this."

And Danilushko did recover. 'Twas Granny Vikhorikha who set him on his feet again. There was such an old woman, they say. She acted as a leech at our works and was famed far and wide. She knew the virtue of each herb, which was good for the toothache and which for sprain, she knew all there was to know. She'd gather the herbs herself at the proper time of the year, when that particular herb was at its best. From some herbs and roots she'd make a brew, from others a decoction which she mixed in with ointments.

Danilo lived well at old Granny Vikhorikha's home. She was a kind-hearted, garrulous old creature, look you, and hanging all over her cottage were dried grasses and roots and flowers. Danilushko, being always curious about grasses, would ask what this one was called and where that one grew, what kind of a flower it had. And the old crone would tell him gladly.

Once Danilushko asked her:

"Do you know every flower in these parts, Granny?"

"Well, I wouldn't go for to brag and boast," says she, "but I fancy I know all that are known so far."

"Why, are there some that aren't known yet?" he goes on.

"Yes," says she, "there are. You've heard of the fern that's supposed to bloom on St. John's day. That's a magic flower. It can be used to find treasure. But it's unwholesome for folks. And on saxifrage you sometimes see a roving light. Catch it and all locks are open to you. 'Tis a thieves' flower. And besides all these I've heard tell of a flower of stone. 'Tis said to grow on the malachite hill and be at its best at Snakes' Holiday. Unlucky the one who ever sets eyes on the stone flower."

"Why, in what way is he unlucky, Granny?"

"As to that, I don't rightly know, child. Only that's what I've been told."

Danilushko might have been left in peace a little longer at Granny Vikhorikha's, only that the steward's spies were watching him. They saw he was able to get about a bit and they ran and told the steward straight away. So he sent for Danilushko and said:

"You can go to old Prokopich now—to learn how to work malachite. 'Tis just the work for you."

There was no help for it. Danilushko started off; so weak was he still that the first breath of wind would blow him over. Prokopich looked at him and said:

"As if the 'prentices weren't bad enough without this! If those great healthy louts couldn't stand the teaching here, what can I do with a fellow like that who can hardly stand on his feet?"

So Prokopich went to the steward and said:

"This isn't the kind I want. You could easy kill a lad like that if you let fly at him, and then you'd have to answer for it."

But the steward wouldn't even listen to him.

"He's been given you—teach him, and don't let us have any more of your gab. He's a strong lad, I'm telling you. Never mind if he looks weedy."

"Well, that's your business," said Prokopich. "So long as it's understood: I'll teach him, only I don't want to have to answer for him."

"There's no one to call you to answer for anything. He's alone in the world. Do as you like with him," the steward said.

Prokopich came home and found Danilushko standing by the bench, turning a slab of malachite over in his hands. There was a scratch made on one side where the edge had to be taken off. Danilushko was standing staring at this spot and shaking his head ruefully over it. Prokopich wondered what this young greenhorn could be staring at. So he demanded very sternly, as his custom was:

"What are you doing there? Who asked you to finger a job? Eh? What are you looking at, anyway?"

Danilushko said then:

"It seems to me, Grandfather, the edge shouldn't be taken off on that side. See, the pattern runs this way and it'll be cut into."

This made Prokopich wild and he started to shout, of course:

"What! Who are you, I'd like to know? You've never had a piece of work in your hands, yet you take it on yourself to judge. What can you understand about it?"

"I understand enough to see this thing is spoilt," Danilushko said.

"Who spoiled it? Eh? The idea of you, a young greenhorn teaching me, the best master in the place, I'll spoil you. . . . There'll be nothing left of you!"

He went on like this, shouting and fussing, but of course he didn't lay a finger on Danilushko. The fact was he had been puzzling over that slab himself, wondering which side to take the edge off. And Danilushko had hit the nail on the head. So when Prokopich had done shouting, he turned to the lad and said, in a good-natured way this time:

"Now then, you master-prodigy, show us how you'd like to have it?"

Then Danilushko started to explain and to show him how he thought it should be done:

"This is how the pattern should go; or better still, narrow down the slab, take the edge off where the margin is plain, unpatterned, and just leave a little twist at the top."

Prokopich, as usual, shouted:

"Well, well. . . . What do you think of that? A lot you understand I'm sure. See you don't spill too much of all you've got."

But at the same time he was thinking to himself:

"The lad's right. You could make something out of a lad like that. Only how would you teach him? First bit of a tap you gave him, he'd start turning his toes up, very likely."

And thinking this over, he asked:

"Who do you belong to, you with all the learning?"

Danilushko told him about himself, that he was an orphan: "I don't remember my mother, and as for my father I don't know who he was. They call me Danilo the Starveling but what my name and patronymic is I do not know." He told how he'd been among servants and why they had got rid of him; how he'd gone out with the cows last summer and got beaten.

Prokopich felt sorry for him.

"You haven't had much of a life, boy," he said, "and now you've fallen into my hands. In this craft of ours you have to be very particular."

Then he made out he was angry again and growled:

"Now, that'll do, that'll do, I say! See what a chatter-box you are! Anybody can work with their tongues instead of their hands. Chitter-chatter all evening. Nice kind of apprentice you'll make!

I'll see to-morrow what you're made of. Now sit down and have your supper and then it'll be time to go to bed."

Prokopich lived alone. His wife had died long since. An old neighbour woman, Mitrofanovna, used to do his housekeeping for him. In the morning she'd come in and cook something, and tidy up, and in the evening he looked after himself.

When they had finished their meal, he said:

"Lie down there on that bench."

Danilushko took off his shoes, put his bast-satchel under his head and covered himself with his coat. He huddled up, shivering a bit, for it was cold in the house, being autumn, but pretty soon he fell fast asleep. Prokopich lay down but couldn't sleep; he couldn't get that malachite pattern out of his head. He turned and tossed a while, then got up and lit a candle, went to his lathe, and started to measure the slab of malachite this way and that. He would cover one edge, then the other, add on a bit to the margin, take off a bit, turn it this way, then the other, and still it always turned out that the lad had understood the pattern better.

"There's a starveling orphan for you!" Prokopich wondered to himself. "He's never seen anything or learned anything, yet he could give a hint to an old craftsman. There's an eye for you! What an eye!"

Then he stole into the little lumber-room and dragged a pillow and a big sheepskin coat out of it, slipped the pillow gently under Danilushko's head and covered him with the coat.

"Sleep well, Sharp Eyes!"

The lad didn't wake, only turned over on the other side, stretched himself out under the coat, feeling the warmth of it, and started to snore and whistle through his nose.

Prokopich had never had any children and this Danilushko had gone straight to his heart. The old craftsman stood there, looking down at him, and Danilushko slept on without a care, whistling through his nose. And now Prokopich felt anxious to see this young lad on his feet properly, so that he wouldn't be so thin and weakly.

"'Tis hardly fitting for a lad in his state of health to take up our trade, where there's dust and poison; 'twill send him into a decline in no time. He ought to have a rest first and pick up and fill out a bit. Then I will start teaching him his trade. And it looks as though there'll be some sense in teaching him."

Next day he said to the boy:

"You can lend a hand about the place first. That's the way I always do it with my apprentices. See? First thing you do to-day, go for some guelder-berries. Now's the time to pick them, when the hoar-frost's touched them—they'll be just right for pies. See you don't go too far, though. As many as you can gather will be plenty. Take some bread with you—the woods make you hungry—and look in at Mitrofanovna's. I told her to cook you a couple of eggs and

pour some milk into the old birch-bark jug with the lid. Understand?"

Next day he said:

"Catch me a goldfinch—a good singer—and a lively young linnet. See you fetch them here by evening. Understand?"

When Danilushko had caught the birds and brought them home, Prokopich thought of something else.

"They'll do, but they're none too good; catch some more."

So it went on like that. Every day Prokopich would find some job for Danilushko, and they were all things that would amuse a boy. As soon as the first snow fell, the old man told him to go with a neighbour for wood, to lend a hand. And what had he to do? Just sit in the front of the sleigh and drive, and on the way back, follow the sleigh on foot. He'd get a nice walk, and eat and sleep better when he got home. Prokopich had a sheepskin coat made for him, a winter cap, gloves and felt winter boots, made to order. Prokopich, look you, was well-to-do. Though a serf, he worked on a quit-rent basis, and was able to earn a bit. He got very fond of Danilushko. Truth to tell he treated him like a son. He never grudged him anything, and wouldn't let him go near the trade till the proper time.

Living a good life like this, Danilushko picked up in no time. And he became very fond of Prokopich, too. Naturally! He understood the care Prokopich was taking of him; he had never had such a happy time in his life. The winter went by; Danilushko was free as a bird. Now he'd go down to the pond, now to the woods. But he had an eye on the craft as well. As soon as he ran home, they'd get talking straight away. He'd have plenty to tell Prokopich and ask him what was this for and how did you do that. Prokopich would explain and show him how to do it. Danilushko took notice. And sometimes he'd want to do it himself. "Now let me have a try," he'd say. Prokopich would look on, put him right when it was needed and show him a better way of doing it.

Once the steward happened to catch sight of Danilushko down at the pond, and he asked his men:

"Whose lad is that? I've seen him at the pond I don't know how many times now, playing about with a fishing-rod of a weekday, and he's no youngster either. Someone's hiding him, keeping him from work, that's plain."

Well, they brought the steward word that this was Prokopich's apprentice, but he wouldn't believe a word of it:

"Fetch him here, I'll find out for myself."

They brought Danilushko to him.

"Whose lad are you? Where do you belong?"

Said Danilushko:

"I'm apprenticed to a master-craftsman in malachite."

The steward grabbed him by the ear.

"So this is the way you learn your trade, is it, you young rascal!" And he dragged him by the ear to Prokopich.

The old man saw that things were looking bad, and he tried to shield poor Danilushko:

"I sent him myself to catch some perch. I've had a terrible wish for a few fresh perch these days. My health being very poor, I can't take anything else to eat. So I sent the youngster to catch some."

The steward wouldn't believe it. He noticed, too, that Danilushko was looking another person altogether: he had filled out, he had a good shirt on him, his breeches and boots, too, were good. So he thought to himself he would test the lad.

"Come now, show us what your master has taught you."

Then Danilushko put on his working apron, went up to the lathe and started to tell him this thing and that thing and to show him. Whatever the steward asked him he had his answer ready. How to hew the stone into shape, how to saw it, how grind the facets, how and with what to glue it, how to polish, how to set it in copper and in wood. In short, it seemed there wasn't a thing he didn't know.

After the steward had learned the ins and outs of everything from him, he went and said to Prokopich:

"It looks as if you've found a lad to suit you?"

"I'm not grumbling," Prokopich said.

"You're not grumbling to be sure, but you're spoiling the lad. He was given you for you to teach him, and I find him at the pond with his fishing-rod. You watch out, or you'll get some perch from me so fresh you'll remember them to your dying day. And it won't be any too good for the boy, either."

After a threat or two like this he left, but Prokopich stood there, wondering:

"When was it you came to learn all this, Danilushko? Seems to me I've not taught you a thing yet."

"You yourself told me and showed me everything I know, and I stood and took heed of what you said."

The tears rolled down old Prokopich's face, 'twas all so much after his own heart.

"Boy," he said, "Danilushko, dear lad! Whatever else I know, I'll tell you . . . all of it. I will keep back nothing."

Only from that time on Danilushko did not have the free and easy life he had been having. The steward sent for him next day, and started giving him jobs for his lessons. At first, of course, they were the simplest things: buttons such as women wear, and caskets. Then things that needed a bit of turning: candlesticks and different kinds of ornaments. Then they came to carving: leaves and petals, patterns and flowers. It is fiddling work that malachite workers have to do, and takes time. A thing may look simple enough, yet a man may have sat ages over it. And so Danilushko grew up at this work.

Once when he turned out a snake-bracelet from a single piece, the steward had to admit this was a proper master-craftsman. And he wrote to the master about him.

After one thing and another in the letter, he wrote: "And we have

a new malachite craftsman here. He is called Danilo the Starveling. A good workman, only being young not so fast. What are your orders: to leave him as an apprentice or put him on a quit-rent basis like Prokopich?"

Now Danilushko was not a slow workman at all, he was most astonishingly quick and handy. 'Twas Prokopich who had had recourse to a little cunning. When Danilushko was given a job to do by the steward in five days, Prokopich would come up and say:

"That's beyond him. You want a fortnight for a job like that. The young chap's only learning his trade yet. If I let him do things in a hurry, he'll go and spoil the stone and it'll be no use for anything."

The steward would argue, but after a bit, look you, he'd add on a day or two. Danilushko took it fairly easy. He even learned, unbeknown to the steward, to read and write. Only a bit, of course, but still he got something of book-learning. Prokopich helped him with that, too. There were times when he himself wanted to do the job the steward had set Danilushko. But this the boy would not allow.

"The very idea! 'Tis not for you, Uncle, to be sitting at the lathe for me. See, your beard is all green with malachite dust; your health is not what it was; but there's nothing wrong with me."

By this time Danilushko was a well-grown lad, although people still called him by his old name—the Starveling. You should have seen him! He was tall and ruddy, a curly-headed cheerful young fellow, enough to send the girls into a decline for love. Prokopich tried to talk him into chosing a bride, but Danilushko only shook his head:

"We'll get one when we want one. Once I've made myself a real craftsman then 'twill be time enough to talk about that."

The master wrote to the steward:

"Tell Prokopich's apprentice Danilo to turn me a vase fitting for my house. Then I will see whether he is to work on a quit-rent basis or be kept as an apprentice. Only see that Prokopich does not help him. If you do not keep a proper eye on him you will have to answer for it."

When the steward got this letter, he sent for Danilushko and said:

"You can work here at my place. They'll fix up a lathe for you and bring whatever stone you need."

Prokopich, when he heard of this, was very cast down. What did it mean, he wondered? What was the reason? He went off to the steward, but bless me, you couldn't get anything out of him. He only shouted:

"It's none of your business!"

Well, Danilushko went to work at the new place. Before he left Prokopich cautioned him:

"Now, see that you don't hurry, Danilushko. Don't show them all you can do."

At first Danilushko paid heed to this and was cautious. He did

a lot of measuring and reckoning, but he soon got sick of it. Whether you got through the work or not, 'twas all the same, you had to stay the day out, sitting at the steward's from morning till night. 'Twas so dull and dreary—it drove Danilushko to working at full speed. And while the mood was on him he turned out a vase. The steward looked at it; this was what was wanted, he thought, so he said:

"Do another like this."

Danilushko did another, then a third:

"Now you can't get out of it. I've fairly got you and your Prokopich. The master set you a certain time, sufficient to do one vase, and you've done three in that time. I know what you're capable of now; you won't take me in any more! As for that old hound, I'll teach him to hide what you can do! I'll make an example of him."

So he wrote to the master about Danilushko and sent him all three vases. But is so happened that the master—whether he was in a good mood that day, or whether he was vexed at the steward for something—did just the opposite of what the steward wanted.

He granted Danilushko a trifle of quit-rent and ordered him not to be taken away from Prokopich: maybe the two of them together would think of something new. There was a picture in the letter, a vase with all kinds of fancy things drawn on it. Round the rim there was a carved border, and round the waist of the vase a stone ribbon with a pierced design, and some leaves at the foot. In short, 'twas a regular invention. And the master had written under the drawing:

"Even if it takes him five years to do it, it must be exactly like this."

And so the steward had to go back on what he'd said to Danilushko. He told him what the master had written, and let him go home to Prokopich and take the master's drawing with him.

Danilushko and Prokopich cheered up then, and their work went a lot better. Very soon Danilushko started on the new vase. It had no end of cunning tricks on it, that vase. Give it a wrong tap with your hammer and all your work went for nothing, you'd have to start over again. But Danilushko had a good straight eye, a steady hand, and plenty of strength too, so things went well. The only thing he didn't like about it was that although there were so many tricky points and it was so hard to do, there seemed to be no beauty in it at all.

He told Prokopich this, but the old man only wondered at him.

"What's that to you? They invented it, so that's how they want it. If you'd seen the things I've turned and carved in my time! For the life of me I couldn't rightly tell you what some of them were for."

Then young Danilo tried to talk to the steward, but what was the use of that? He only stamped his foot and waved his hands in the air.

"Have you gone right off your head?" he shouted. "That drawing cost a lot of money. Maybe the artist who did it was the best in the capital, and you presume to judge it."

Then he called to mind what the master had said, that perhaps the two of them would think out something new, for he said:

"Listen to me: you do this vase like the master's drawing and after that if you think of something else, out of your own head, then that's your business. I won't hinder you and we have stone enough, God knows. I'll let you have whatever sort you want."

So Danilushko fell to thinking out ideas. As was said long before our time, it doesn't take much wisdom to run down other folks' work, but when it comes to inventing something of your own you're likely to lie tossing and turning many a night. And now Danilushko would sit working on the vase he had to make according to the master's design, but his thoughts would be on something else. He'd turn things over in his mind, wondering what flower, what leaf suited malachite best. He grew very moody and thoughful, and lost his brightness.

Prokopich noticed this and asked:

"Aren't you well, Danilushko? You ought to take it easier with that vase. What's the hurry? You'd do well to take a rest and have a bit of fun somewhere instead of sitting over it day in day out."

"That's true," said Danilushko, "I might take a stroll out to the woods. Maybe I'll see what I'm needing there."

So from then on he went off to the woods nearly every day. 'Twas just about haymaking-time, berry-time. The grasses and wild flowers were all in bloom. Danilushko would keep stopping every now and again in a meadow or a glade and stare about him. Or he'd come out again into the hayfield, looking hard at the grass as if he was searching for something. There were plenty of people about at a time like that in the meadows and woods. They would ask Danilushko had he lost anything. And he'd just give a rueful smile and say:

"'Tis not so much that I've lost something, as that I can't find it."

Well, naturally, there were some who said behind his back:

"There's something wrong with the lad."

He would come home and sit down straight away at the lathe and stay there till morning. But at sunrise off he'd go again to the woods and meadows. He took to bringing leaves and flowers home with him, mostly the poisonous kind: bear-garlick and hemlock, thorn-apple, marsh-rosemary, and all kinds of cresses. His face grew peaked, his eyes were restless, his hands lost their sureness. Prokopich was downright worried about him by this time, but Danilushko told him:

"'Tis the vase that gives me no peace. I want to do it so that the full virtue of the stone is seen."

Prokopich tried talking him out of it:

"What have you got that into your head for? You've plenty to eat, haven't you? Let the gentlefolks amuse themselves as they think fit, so long as they don't hurt us. If they happen to think of some new pattern we'll do it, but why should we meet them half-way? 'Tis only taking an extra burden upon ourselves, that's all."

But Danilushko stuck to his notion.

"'Tis not for the master I'm trying," he said. "I can't get that vase out of my head. Look at the stone we have, and what do we make out of it? We grind it and carve it and put a polish on it all for nothing. Now, I've a fancy to do something so that the full virtue of the stone itself could be seen and made manifest to people."

Some time passed; he quietened down and started to work again on the vase the master had ordered. And working on it he would make fun of the thing he was doing:

"A stone ribbon with holes in it, and a carved edge!"

And all of a sudden he'd throw down his work, and start something else, working at the lathe without a minute's rest.

"I've a mind to make my vase like the hemlock flower," he said.

Again Prokopich tried to talk him out of it.

At first Danilushko didn't want to listen, but after three or four days, when something went wrong, he told Prokopich:

"Very well! First I'll finish the master's vase and after that my own. But you mustn't try to put me off it then, I can't get it out of my head."

"All right, I won't hinder you," Prokopich said, thinking to himself: "The lad's getting better, he'll forget it. But he ought to be married. That's it! That'll knock all the nonsense out of his head, when he has a family."

Danilushko set to work on his vase. There was much work in it, more than enough for a year. But he worked hard and didn't mention the hemlock-flower again. So Prokopich started to work round to the question of his marrying.

"Look at Katya Letemina. What's wrong with her as a bride? She's a good girl. Not a word can be said against her."

Now Prokopich was artful in saying this, for he had noticed long since that Danilushko had his eye on that girl. And she, as far as he could see, was not unwilling. So Prokopich mentioned her, just by the way, as it might be. But Danilushko stood out for his own.

"Have patience. Let me get done with the vase first. I'm sick of it. One of these days I may give it a tap with the hammer, and you come with your talk about weddings! Katya and I have agreed about it: she's going to wait for me."

Well, Danilushko made the vase according to the master's drawing. They didn't tell the steward it was finished: they were thinking of having a bit of festivity at home to celebrate. Katya, his bride, came with her folks. The rest of the company were mostly malachite workers. Katya was all for admiring the vase.

"How in the world did you manage to carve a pattern like that and never a chip or a crack in the stone anywhere? Look at the smoothness and the cleanness of the work!"

A craftsman said the same:

"'Tis the very image of the drawing. There's not a thing you could find fault with, and so quick, too! If you go on working like that, it looks as though we'll have a job to keep up with you."

Danilushko listened awhile, and then he said:

"The trouble is there's nothing to find fault with. 'Tis smooth and finished; the design's come out clean, and the carving's correct by the drawing, but where's the beauty of it? Take that flower there, the meanest there is, yet it does your heart good to look at it. And who would get any pleasure out of looking at this vase? What is it for? Whoever looks at it will admire it like Katyá and say what an eye the man had who made it, and what a hand and how could he have the patience not to break the stone anywhere. . . ."

"And where he'd made a flaw in it, he put on a bit of glue and polished it so that you'd never find the head or tail of it," the craftsman put in laughing.

"That's it. But where, I'm asking, do you see the beauty of the stone itself? There was a nice bit of veining ran here and you had to bore holes in it and carve flowers on it. What are they for? Only spoiling the stone. And look what stone it is! The very best, look you, the very best!"

He was getting warmed up now. He'd had a drop to drink, of course. The craftsmen said what Prokopich himself had often said:

"Stone's stone and that's all there is to it. What can you do with stone. It's our job to cut and turn and carve it."

But there happened to be an old fellow there who'd taught Prokopich and the other craftsmen. They all called him Grandfather. He was very old and decrepit now, but he understood all this talk and he said to young Danilushko:

"Don't you go walking that plank, my dear lad. Put all those notions out of your head! Or you'll find yourself one of the craftsmen working for the Mistress of the Copper Mountain."

"What manner of craftsmen are those, Grandfather?"

"The craftsmen who live in the mountain, no one ever sees them. Whatever the Mistress wants, that they do. I once saw a piece of their work. That was craftsmanship! There's a sight of difference between that and what we do hereabouts."

Well, everyone wanted to know more about it. What thing had he seen? they asked him.

"'Twas a snake," he said at last, "the kind you make into bracelets."

"Well, and what about it? What did it look like?"

"Not a bit like these hereabouts," the old man said again. "Any master-craftsman who once set eyes on it would know straight away 'twas not local work. The snakes we make, no matter how clean a job we do, are just stone snakes, but this one was like a living snake. The back was black, the eyes . . . aye, you'd think 'twas ready to jump at you. Naturally, a bit of a thing like that is nothing for those workmen. They've seen the stone-flower, they know what real beauty is."

Now at the first word about the stone-flower, Danilushko started asking questions of the craftsman. But the old fellow answered honestly enough:

"I know nothing about it, lad, only that I've heard tell there is such a flower. But 'tis not for the likes of us to look upon. Whoever sets eyes upon it, loses all heart for living in this world."

"I'd like to have a look at it, all the same," said Danilushko.

At this, Katya, his bride, was all of a flutter.

"What are you thinking about, Danilushko? You don't mean you're sick of this world?" And she burst out crying.

Then Prokopich and the other craftsmen saw what was up and started ridiculing the old man.

"You're losing your wits, Grandfather, to be telling a pack of fairy-tales and leading the lad astray."

This put the old man in a temper. He thumped the table and shouted:

"There is such a flower! The lad is right when he says we don't understand this stone. The real beauty of the stone is manifested in that stone-flower I'm telling you about."

"You've had a drop too much, that's all, Grandfather," the others said, trying to laugh him out of it.

But he held to his own:

"There is a stone-flower."

When the party broke up and the people went home, Danilushko couldn't get this talk out of his head. He took to going off to the woods again and hanging over his hemlock-flower, and never said a word about the wedding. At last Prokopich got at him again:

"What are you disgracing the girl for? How many years is she to go about unwed? They'll start making fun of her soon, you'll see. Gossips are not wanting hereabouts."

But Danilushko would have nothing but his own idea:

"Wait a while till I've thought of something and chosen a stone."

And he took to frequenting the copper-mine, Gumyeshka. Sometimes he'd go down the shaft and through the drifts, sometimes he'd pick up a few stones at the top. Once, as he was turning over a stone and looking at it, he said:

"No, that's not it. . . ."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than he heard someone say:

"Look in another spot. . . . At Snake Hill."

Danilushko looked round, but there was no one there. Who could it be? Somebody playing a joke on him, no doubt. Yet there didn't seem to be any spot in which to hide. He looked again and was turning homeward, when someone called after him:

"Do you hear, master Danilo? Go and look on Snake Hill."

He looked round and saw what seemed to be a woman, but 'twas as hazy as a blue mountain mist, and the next moment there was nothing.

"What does this mean, I wonder? Could it be the Mistress herself. And what if I was to go now to Snake Hill?"

He knew this mountain well, 'twas not far from Gumyeshka. It

isn't there any more now, they levelled it long ago, but in the old days they got the stone from the top.

The next day Danilushko went there. Though it wasn't very high, 'twas steep. And on one side it looked for all the world as though it had been sliced off; a better break you wouldn't wish to see. All the layers were plain to the eye.

So up went Danilushko to this break and finds a great lump of malachite, too heavy to carry, and shaped like a bush. Danilushko examined his find this way and that. It had everything he wanted: the colour deeper down below, the veins in the places they should be—everything just as he could wish. Danilushko was delighted. He ran for a horse and brought the stone home.

"Look!" he said to Prokopich. "What d'you think of this for a stone? It might have been made for my work. Now I'll get it done in no time. Then we'll have the wedding. You're right—I've kept Katya waiting too long. 'Tis none too easy for me, either. Only this work kept me from it. I must get it done as soon as possible!"

So he set to work on the stone. There was neither night nor day for him. Prokopich said nothing, thinking to himself: "Maybe the lad will be satisfied when he gets his wish." The work went well. He finished working the bottom of the lump. And it looked for all the world like a clump of hemlock. With its broad leaves all clustered together, saw-toothed and veined—you couldn't have wanted it to turn out better. Prokopich himself said 'twas like a growing flower, you had only to reach out and touch it.

But as Danilushko was working up to the top, it didn't go so nicely; something hindered him. He chiselled out the stem and the leaves at the side were so thin, you wondered how they held together. The cup itself was meant to be the hemlock flower, but—it wasn't right. The flower looked dead and it had lost its beauty.

Danilushko, when it came to this point, couldn't get a wink of sleep. He would sit working on his vase, wondering how to put it right and carve it better. Prokopich and the other craftsmen who came in to have a look at it couldn't understand what more the young fellow wanted. He had turned out a vase that looked like nothing anybody had ever done before, and still he was not satisfied with it. The fellow was going mad and must be cured of it. When Katya heard the way people were talking she began to cry, and that brought Danilushko to his senses.

"All right," he said, "I won't bother any more. 'Tis plain that I'm not meant to rise any higher, to understand the virtue of the stone."

And he himself hurried things on for the wedding. But where was the need to hurry when the bride had everything ready long before? They named the day. Danilushko cheered up. He mentioned the vase to the steward and the latter hurried to Prokopich to look. Well, that was something to look at, he thought, and he wanted to send it straight away to the master. But Danilushko said:

"Hold on awhile yet—there's a trifle to be done to it."

'Twas the autumn, and the wedding was to be on Snakes' Holiday.

Someone, as it happened, reminded him of it: "Soon all the snakes will be gathering in one spot," they said. Danilushko bore these words in mind. And then the talk about the malachite flower all came back to him. And something seemed to draw him on. Should he not perhaps go out for the last time to Snake Hill? Might he not find out something there? He remembered the big lump of malachite and how it seemed to have been left there on purpose. And the voice at the old mine, telling him about Snake Hill.

So Danilushko set out. The ground was already hard and a fine snow had fallen. Danilushko went up the steep slope where he'd found the stone and saw a big hollow as though someone had been quarrying there. Never thinking of who might have broken the stone, Danilushko stepped into the hollow. "I'll sit me down for a while out of the wind for a rest, 'twill be warmer here." He looked round and there against one side of the hollow was a grey stone shaped like a chair. He sat down on it and fell to thinking, staring at the ground. The thought of the stone-flower gave him no peace. "If I could have but a sight of it!" he kept saying. Then all of a sudden he felt it grow warm as though summer had come back. Danilushko looked up and there right before him against the other side sat the Mistress of the Copper Mountain.

He knew her at once by her beauty and her malachite dress. Only he thought to himself:

"Maybe it's all my fancy, and there isn't really anyone."

So he kept still, staring at the spot where the Mistress was sitting as though she were not there. She said nothing, either, for a while, but seemed to be thinking of something. At last she asked him:

"Well, Master Danilo, so your hemlock-cup didn't turn out well?"

"No, it did not," he agreed.

"No need for you to be cast down! Try another. You'll be given whatever stone you need for your fancy."

"No," he said, "I can't try any more. I am worn out with this one and 'tis not what I hoped. Show me the stone-flower."

"That's easily done," said she, "only you'll rue it afterwards."

"You'll not let me leave the hill?"

"Why shouldn't I let you leave? The way is open to you, only . . . folks always come back to me."

"Show it to me! Do me a favour!"

She tried to talk him out of it:

"Maybe you'll try your hand again at making one for yourself!" She reminded him of Prokopich too: "He took pity on you, now it's your turn to take pity on him." She reminded him of his promised bride: "The girl pins all her hopes on you, while you are looking somewhere else."

"I know, I know all this myself!" Danilushko cried. "But without the stone-flower, there's no life for me. Show it to me!"

"So be it," she said. "Come, then, master Danilo, and I'll show you my garden."

As she said this she stood up and at the same moment there was a noise like a land-slide. Danilushko looked and saw that the walls were gone. There were the tallest trees you ever saw, not like those in our woods, but stone trees. Some were of marble, some of snake-stone. There were all kinds of them; only they were living trees with branches and leaves. And they stirred and swayed in the breeze making a noise as though you were flinging handfuls of pebbles. Round the foot of the trees was grass also of stone. Sky-blue, crimson —grass of every hue. There was no sun to be seen, yet 'twas bright as if just before sunset. Between the trees little golden snakes writhed and swayed as if they were dancing: 'twas from them that the glow of light came.

Now the Mistress led Danilushko out to a big glade. The soil looked like ordinary clay but the bushes growing there were black as velvet. And on these bushes were large green malachite bells with a tiny antimony star in their centres. Fiery bees gleamed above these stone-flowers, and the little stars rang softly as though they were singing a song.

"Well, master Danilo, have you looked your fill?" the Mistress asked.

"You'd never find a stone to make that flower!" cried Danilushko.

"If you had thought of this flower yourself, I'd have given you a stone like that one, but now I can't."

And with that she gave a wave of her hand. Again there was a noise, and then Danilushko found himself sitting on the stone in the hollow. The wind was whistling furiously. You know the way it does in autumn.

Danilushko came home, and as it fell out his bride-to-be was giving an evening festivity for her friends. At first he was jolly and cheerful, sang songs, danced for them. Then he clouded over, as it were. The bride was alarmed:

"What's the matter with you? One would think you were at a funeral."

"My head aches," he said, "there's a blackness mixed with red and green before my eyes. I can't see the light."

With that the guests went home.

According to custom the bride and her friends came out to see the bridegroom home. And, as there was no distance to go at all, Danilushko only living a couple of houses away, Katya said:

"Come, let's go for a stroll all round the place, girls, we'll go to the end of our street and come back by Elanskaya." And she thought to herself: "The wind will blow on Danilushko, and maybe he will feel better."

The girls, naturally, were only too glad.

"That's the proper way to see you off!" they cried. "He lives too near, we haven't sung him the parting-song properly."

'Twas a quiet night, with a light fall of snow. Just the time for jollity. So they set out. The bride and bridegroom walked in front, while the bride's friends and the bachelors who'd been at the party dropped behind a bit. Then the girls struck up the parting song, a slow plaintive melody like a lament for the dead. Katya saw there wasn't any sense in this at all:

"Danilushko is downhearted enough as it is, and they're singing this weird lament into the bargain!"

She tried to distract his thoughts to other things. He began to talk, but soon grew sad again. Meantime Katya's friends had finished the parting-song and started other, more cheerful songs. There was laughter and running hither and thither, but Danilushko walked on, with bowed head. No matter how Katya tried, she could not cheer him up. In this way they reached the house. The girls and boys parted, going their ways, and Danilushko without any old rites saw his bride home and then went home himself.

Prokopich had gone to bed long since. Quietly lighting the lamp, Danilushko carried his vases out to the middle of the room and looked them over. Just then Prokopich had a fit of coughing. It shook him sorely. His health, look you, had been failing these last years. This coughing of his went through Danilushko like a knife, and he remembered all that their life had been together. And a great tenderness for the old man came over him. Prokopich, when he had done coughing, asked:

"What are you doing with the vases?"

"Just having a look at them, thinking maybe 'tis time we were sending them off."

Prokopich agreed:

"They should have been sent long since; they're only taking up room here. And anyway you'll never do better."

Well, they talked a while longer, then Prokopich dropped off again. And Danilushko went to bed, but there was no sleep for him. He turned and tossed, got up again, lit the lamp, took another look at the vases, went up to Prokopich and stood awhile looking down at the old man, sighing.

Then he picked up the hammer and gave the hemlock-flower such a crack that it fell to pieces. But the other vase, the one that was done according to the master's drawing, he did not touch. He only spat into it and ran out of the house. And from that day to this Danilushko was never found.

Some said he'd lost his wits and was roaming the woods, others again that the Mistress of Copper Mountain had taken him to be a master-craftsman in the mountain.

The truth turned out to be otherwise. But that is another story.

THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

NOW KATYA, THE GIRL TO WHOM DANILO HAD BEEN BETROTHED, HAD remained unmarried. Two or three years had passed since Danilo disappeared and she was long past the normal age for marriage in our parts. At the Works here anything over twenty is considered old. Young lads seldom court girls who are more than that and they usually marry older men, widowers. But this Katya, she was so pretty a girl, look you, that all the young bachelors were after her just the same. But Katya always said the same thing:

"I am betrothed to Danilo."

"Ah, come now," they said to her. "You were betrothed, but nothing came of it. You must forget about Danilo. He's been dead a long time now."

But Katya wouldn't yield:

"I am betrothed to Danilo. Maybe he'll come back," she told them.

They said:

"But he's no longer alive. Truly he's not."

But she still maintained:

"Nobody's ever seen him dead, and for me he is still alive."

The young men saw that the girl was not herself and gave up paying court to her. Some of them made fun of her and nicknamed her 'The Corpse's Bride.' The nickname stuck to her and people started calling her Katya Corpse-Bride as if she had no other name.

One day some plague or other broke out at the Works and Katya's old parents both died of it. There were a lot of them in the family: three married brothers and several married sisters besides Katya. A dispute arose between them as to who should live in their parents' house now. Katya saw there was going to be a quarrel about it, so she said:

"I'm going to live at Danilo's hut. Old Prokopich has grown too old to look after himself. I'll be able to help him."

Her brothers and sisters tried to dissuade her, of course:

"'Twould not be seemly, sister. Prokopich may be old, but you know what people would say."

"What do I care what they say?" she answered. "It won't be my tongue that will do the wagging. And Prokopich is just like one of the family to me. He's been a father to my Danilo. I shall call him 'Father' in fact."

So off she went. Her brothers and sisters didn't go out of their way to stop her. "One less in the family will mean more room for the rest of us," they thought. As for old Prokopich, he was delighted.

"Thank you, Katyenka, for remembering me," he said to her.

So Katya started living at old Prokopich's house. He worked at his bench, and she did the household tasks, worked in the garden,

cooked and washed up and so forth. There wasn't much to do, with only the two of them, and Katya was quick at her work so it didn't take her long. And when she'd finished she'd sit down at the table and sew and knit and all the rest of it.

At first all went smoothly. But gradually Prokopich became more and more weak and ailing. For every day he worked he had to spend two in bed. He was quite worn out, the old fellow was. And so Katya fell to pondering how they'd be able to carry on:

"One can't earn enough to live on by women's work: sewing and knitting and so forth; and that's the only work I know how to do."

So one day she said to Prokopich:

"I say, Dad! Couldn't you teach me how to do some of your work—some of the simpler things?"

Prokopich laughed at the idea:

"A girl work at malachite indeed! What ever next? I never heard of such a thing in all my life."

All the same, she began watching Prokopich at work and helped him where she could, sawing and polishing and doing various little jobs like that. And Prokopich showed her how to do one or two things: how to turn the malachite plates in the lathe; how to make handles for knives and forks and other things that had to be done. Small, unimportant jobs, of course, but useful in case of need.

Before long old Prokopich died. When this happened, Katya's brothers and sisters urged her more strongly than ever:

"You simply must marry now. How could you possibly live here all on your own?"

But Katya replied:

"That's my look-out; not yours. And as to this husband you're always talking about, I've no need of him. My Danilushko will come back. He'll learn what he wants to learn in the mountain and then he'll come back to me."

Her brothers and sisters threw up their hands in despair:

"Are you crazy, Katerina? Why, it's a sin even to speak of such a thing. The man's been dead all this time and yet you still go on waiting for him! If you go on like that you'll be seeing things."

"I'm not afraid of that," she said.

Then they asked:

"But what are you going to live on?"

"You needn't worry about that either," she said. "I'll manage all right."

Her relatives thought Prokopich must have left her some money, and started the same old song:

"Lord, what a fool you are! If you've got some money, you simply must have a man in the house. Otherwise, look you, robbers will be after it. They'll wring your neck like a chicken's. You'll hardly have seen the world you were born in."

"What I am fated to see, that I will see," she told them.

Her brothers and sisters raged and roared for a long time, some

shouting, some persuading, some weeping. But it was no good. Katya held to her own.

"I can manage all right by myself. I don't need a husband. I've got one already."

This obstinacy made them angry.

"Well, if that's the case, don't ever let us set eyes on you again," they said.

"Thank you, dear brothers, kind sisters," she said. "I shall remember. But you too must remember—to pass by my door."

This was said in jest, look you, but her relatives went out, slamming the door behind them.

So Katya was left there, all alone. To be sure she cried a little but then she said: "Now this must stop. It won't do to give in."

So she dried her eyes and set about tidying up the house. She washed and scrubbed and made everything neat and clean. When she'd finished she went over to the bench and tidied that up too in her own way. She put nearest to hand the tools and materials she would be needing to use most, and the others further away. Having arranged everything to her satisfaction, she was about to sit down, thinking:

"I'll see if I can't make one of those plates myself."

She looked round for a piece of malachite of the size she wanted, but couldn't find one. There were still the fragments of Danilo's vase, but she was keeping them and had tied them up in a separate bundle. Prokopich naturally had had a great many stones. But just before his death he'd been engaged on large-scale work, and the stones had all been big ones. He'd used up all the small blocks and fragments for other little jobs. So Katya thought to herself:

"I'd better go and have a look at the slag-heaps at the mine. Maybe I'll be able to find a piece of malachite of the size I want."

She had heard Danilo and Prokopich say it was at Snake Hill that they found their stones. So she went there.

There were a lot of people working at the Gumyoshevsky mine: some breaking up the ore, some carting it away. They all stared at Katya, wondering where she was going with that wicker-basket of hers. Katya didn't like being stared at, so she didn't stop to look for malachite there, but went round to the other side of the hill. On that side there was a forest growing. Katya made her way though the forest and came out on the side of Snake Hill itself.

She sat down on a piece of rock and somehow she couldn't help thinking about Danilo. She felt very sad and began to cry. There was no one about and the forest was thick, so she wasn't afraid anyone would see her; and her tears flowed freely.

She'd been weeping like this for a while, when all of a sudden she noticed a piece of malachite on the ground just at her feet, but it was embedded. How could she get it out, having neither pick nor other tool with her?

Anyhow, Kayta tried to shake it loose with her hands as it did not seem to be very firmly embedded; and then she got a stick and started

scraping the earth away from the sides. She scraped away as much as she could and then tried to shift the stone again; and this time it gave way. It snapped at the bottom, like a twig. The stone was small, slab-shaped, as thick as three fingers, as broad as the palm of her hand and not more than two feet in length. Katya was astonished: "Why, it's just the size I was looking for," she thought, "If I saw it up, I can get quite a lot of plates from it. And I shall hardly have to waste any of it."

She took the stone home with her and at once started sawing it up. It was work that couldn't be done quickly and she had all the household things to attend to as well. So what with one thing and the other she had her hands full all day, and had no time to feel sorrowful. But when she sat down at the bench, she couldn't help thinking:

"If only Danilo could see the new craftsman we've got here! And sitting at the bench where he and Prokopich used to work!"

Of course there were some louts who tried to disturb her. How could there fail to be? One night before some holiday, Katya was working late. Three young men climbed over the fence into the garden. Whether they just wanted to give her a fright or whether they had some other design, I can't tell you, but anyway they were all tipsy. Katya was sawing, so she didn't hear them coming. She only heard them when they were banging at the door of the hut.

"Open the door, Corpse's Bride! Let some live men in!"

At first Katya tried to reason with them:

"Run along now, boys!"

But they didn't take any heed of this, and started banging on the door so heavily it looked as if it would break. Thereupon Katya lifted the catch, flung open the door and shouted:

"Come on in, then. Who wants his head bashed first?"

And the louts saw that she had an axe in her hand. "Stop this fooling," one of them said.

"Who's fooling? Whoever crosses the threshold first will get a blow on the head."

Tipsy though they were, the men could see she was in earnest. She was a big strong girl, her shoulders were braced, her eyes looked set and determined and she had an axe in her hand. So they dared not enter. They blustered a bit and then went and told their friends what had happened. People chaffed them for having run away, all three of them, from one girl. This wasn't to their liking, so they made up a story that Katya had not been alone, that the ghost of Danilo had been standing behind her.

"'Twas so terrible we couldn't help running away," they said.

Not everybody believed their story, of course; but all the same word went round after that:

"There's queer goings-on in that hut. It's not for nothing she lives there all by herself."

This reached Katya's ears, but it didn't trouble her.

"So much the better," she thought. "They won't try creeping into my hut again if they're frightened."

The neighbours were astonished, too, that Katya was working at a bench. They made fun of her:

"Taken up a man's trade, she has! Whatever will become of her!"

Katya was more sensitive to that sort of criticism. At times she herself wondered: "Can I learn to do it, just on my own like this?" But she pulled herself together and said: "Ornaments to sell at the market. No great skill required. They've just got to be smooth, that's all. Surely I can master that much."

She sawed the stone up, and when she did so she found that it had an unusual pattern on it and that it seemed to be marked in just the places where she had to saw across. She was astonished at the handy way it all worked out.

When she'd sawn the stone into the number of pieces she wanted, she began to turn them. Quite a simple job to do, but you have to be used to it just like everything else. At first she found it tiring work, but after a little while she got the hang of it. Although the stone gave her quite a number of plates there was practically no waste. She only had to throw away what came off during the turning.

The plates finished, Katya again marvelled at the perfect piece of malachite she'd found and bethought herself where she could best dispose of her handiwork. Prokopich had always taken such things to the town and sold them to a man who had a shop there. Katya had often heard about this shop. So she decided to take the plates there.

"I'll ask this man to buy my work regularly," she said.

So she shut up the hut and set off for the town. No one at Polyevsky noticed her going.

She asked where the shop was and went straight there. The shop was full of articles of different stone, and as for malachite plates, there was a whole glass case full of them. The shop was filled with people, some buying things and others selling their own wares. The trader was a stern, solemn sort of man. Katya was afraid to go up to him at first, but after a bit she plucked up courage and asked him:

"Would you like to buy some malachite plates?"

The trader pointed to the glass case:

"Can't you see what a lot I have already?"

And the craftsmen who were selling their work to him, chimed after him:

"All sorts of people think they can make plates nowadays. They simply spoil good stone, that's all. They don't realize that to make a good plate you've got to have a good pattern."

One of the craftsmen was a Polyevsky man, and he whispered to the trader:

"She's half-witted, this girl is. The neighbours have seen her working at a bench. She's probably done the thing herself."

The trader turned to Katya and said:

"Well, show us what you've brought."

Katya showed him one of the plates. He looked at it and stared hard at her and said:

"From whom did you steal this?"

Naturally Katya was offended at this, and she said angrily:

"What right have you to say such a thing about someone you don't even know? Take a look at these then—if you aren't blind. How could I possibly have stolen as many plates as this all with the same design on them. Here!" And so saying she spread all the plates she had made on the counter.

The trader and the craftsman examined the plates, and it was quite true—they all had the same pattern on them. And it was a very unusual pattern. A tree in the middle with a little bird perched on one of its branches and another little bird below it; all very clear and neatly done, it was.

Hearing their conversation, the customers who were in the shop crowded round to have a look at the plates, but the trader quickly covered them up. He had found good wares:

"You can't see them properly when they're in a heap," he told them. "Just a minute and I'll put them in the glass case; and then you can pick out the ones you want." And to Katya he said: "Go through that door. I'll pay you right away."

Katya did as he said and the trader came in after her. He shut the door and asked her:

"How much do you want for them?"

Katya had heard the prices Prokopich sold his work for, so she said the same. But the trader just laughed:

"What are you thinking of? Why, the only people I've ever paid prices like that to were the Polyevsky craftsman Prokopich and his adopted son Danilo. But then they were real craftsmen."

"'Twas they who told me of you," said Katya. "I'm from the same family."

"Really now," said the trader, surprised. "So I suppose that's some of Danilo's work you've brought me to-day."

"No," she replied, "it's my own."

"Well, the stone—I suppose that was one that he left when he died?"

"No, I found the stone as well."

The trader obviously didn't believe her, but he didn't stop to argue the matter. He paid her an honest price for the plates and said:

"If you make any more like these bring them along. I will give you a good price for them."

Katya went home, rejoicing over all the money she had got for her work. The trader put the plates in his glass case and his customers crowded round to see them.

"How much?" they asked.

And the trader—who knew what he was about—named a price which was ten times what he'd given Katya for them, telling them:

"The finest pattern ever! Made by the Polyevsky master Danilo. There's no better craftsman living!"

Katya made her way home and as she went thought to herself:

"What an amazing thing! My plates turned out to be the best of the lot! What a stroke of luck it was finding that stone." And the idea suddenly struck her: "Maybe the stone was a message to me from Danilo."

This thought had no sooner entered her head than she turned round and went as fast as she could to Snake Hill.

It happened that the craftsman who had tried to spoil Katya's chances at the trader's was also on his way back from town. He was envious that Katya had hit on such a rare design.

"I must find out where she gets her stone," he thought. "Maybe Prokopich or Danilo showed her some new place!"

Seeing Katya set off, he followed her. He saw her skirt the Gumyoshevsky mine and go up Snake Hill. He followed her, thinking: "There's forest on that side. I'll be able to creep through it and find where this pit of hers is."

They reached the forest. Katya was only a short distance ahead but she never once looked round to see if she was being followed; and the craftsman rubbed his hands with glee at the thought that he would so easily find a new place to get his stone from. But suddenly he heard a loud noise coming from somewhere behind him, so loud that it gave him quite a fright. He turned round to see what it was, and when he looked back again, Katya had disappeared. He ran and ran through the forest—ran nearly all the way to Seversky Pond, a good two versts from Gumyeshka—but he couldn't find her again.

Katya had no idea that anyone was following her. She climbed up to the very spot where she'd found the first stone. The hollow where the stone had been now seemed bigger and at the side of it was another stone of the same kind. Katya tried to shake it loose and it snapped off as before like a twig. Katya picked up the stone and started weeping and lamenting over it as women do over the dead, saying all sorts of things to it:

"Why did you leave me, dearest one?" And such like.

Having had her cry, she felt better somehow, and stood there thinking and gazing towards the mine. At the spot where she was there was a kind of clearing with a dense forest of tall trees all round, but over towards the mine the trees were thinner. The sun broke through there, shining so bright on the ground that it seemed to glow and all the stones on it sparkled.

Katya stared at this sunlit patch and wanted to get nearer to it. She started walking towards it, but the ground gave way under her feet. She extricated one foot and looked down, but there was no ground beneath her feet. She was standing on a tall tree, on the very top of it. From all sides tall trees were advancing towards her and below, in the gaps between them, grew grass and flowers, but quite unlike any we have hereabouts.

Any other girl in Katya's place would have been scared and started shrieking and crying, but Katya was thinking of other things:

"The Mountain has opened up!" she said to herself, "maybe I shall see Danilo."

Hardly had the thought crossed her mind than she saw, walking below in the gaps between the trees, someone who looked like Danilo, and his arms were stretched out towards her, as if he wanted to say something. Scarcely knowing what she was doing, Katya leaped off the tree towards him. . . . But she only fell on the ground where she had been standing before.

She thought over what had happened and said to herself:

"It's quite true: I'm beginning to imagine things. I'd better go straight home."

It was long past time to go back, but she still sat there hoping that the mountain would open and she'd catch a glimpse of Danilo again. Till nightfall she stayed there. Then when it was dark she set off for home, thinking: "After all, I've seen Danilushko! I've seen him."

The craftsman who had followed her also got home about then. He noticed that Katya's hut was still shut up, so he hid and waited to see what she'd bring back with her. When he saw her coming he got up and stood in the middle of the road.

"Where have you been to?" he asked her.

"To Snake Hill," said Katya.

"At night? What for?"

"To see Danilo."

The craftsman stepped back in horror. And the next day there were whisperings at the Works:

"Corpse-bride has quite lost her senses. She goes wandering round Snake Hill in the middle of the night, looking for the dead. She'll be setting the Works on fire if we aren't careful, so crazy she is."

When her brothers and sisters heard these rumours they went to her hut and started coaxing and scolding her more than ever. But Katya wouldn't even listen to them. She just showed them the money she'd earned and said:

"Well, where do you think I got this money from? They wouldn't buy the work of established craftsmen, yet they gave me all this for the first job I ever did. What do you say to that, eh?"

Her brothers had heard about this success of hers, but all they said was:

"Just a stroke of luck. That's all there is to it."

"There are no strokes of luck like this. 'Twas Danilo himself brought me the stone and made the pattern on it."

At this her brothers laughed and her sisters threw up their hands: "She's really lost her wits," they said. "We shall have to tell the Manager about her. She might really set the Works on fire."

But of course they didn't do so. They were ashamed to give their sister away. When they left, however, they said to each other:

"We must keep an eye on Katerina. Wherever she goes we must follow her."

As for Katya, having said good-bye to her relatives, she shut the door and sat down at the bench and started sawing up the new stone. And as she sawed she thought:

"If this stone turns out to be as good, 'twill be proof that I wasn't imagining things, that I really did see Danilo."

She sawed as quickly as she could. She was longing to see if there was a good pattern in the stone, like the last time. It was far on into the night and still she sat on at her bench.

It so happened that one of her sisters woke up in the middle of the night and noticed the light in the window of Katya's hut. So she got up and ran to the window and looked in through a crack in the shutters, and gasped:

"She doesn't even go to sleep. What a curse the girl is!"

Katya sawed off a slab; the pattern was plainly visible and even better than the first one. A bird was flying downwards from a tree, with outstretched wings, and flying towards it from below was another bird, the pattern being repeated five times. And it was marked clearly where to saw the stone.

Katya didn't pause to think, but jumped up and dashed out of the hut. Her sister ran after her, calling to her brothers on the way: "Quick!" she shouted, "Follow her!" So the brothers ran out too and knocked up some neighbours. It was beginning to get light and they could see Katya running past the Gumyoshevsky mine. The crowd ran after her, and she all this while quite unaware of being followed. After passing the mine, she slowed down a little and made for the other side of Snake Hill. The crowd followed her. "Now we'll see what she's up to!" they thought.

Katya walked as usual up the hill side. She looked around and this time the forest seemed to her strange. She touched a tree, and it was as cold and smooth as polished stone. And the grass at her feet was also of stone; and it was quite dark there.

"I must have lost my way," she thought.

Meanwhile the people who were following her were quite alarmed:

"Wherever has she got to? A moment ago she was quite close and now she's vanished!"

They hunted up and down for her. Some of them climbed to the top of the hill and some went round the side of it; and they kept shouting to each other:

"Have you seen her?"

They searched everywhere, but couldn't find her.

"Maybe she's got inside the mountain," they thought.

Meanwhile Katya was walking through the stone forest and wondering how she could find Danilo. As she walked along, she shouted:

"Danilo, answer me!"

An echo stirred among the trees. The branches seemed to beat out:

"He's not here, not here, not here!"

But Katya wouldn't give in.

"Danilo, answer me!"

Again the forest echoed:

"He's not here, not here, not here!"

Katya shouted yet a third time:

"Danilo, answer me!"

At that moment the Mistress of the Copper Mountain stood before her. Katya could only just make her out.

"What are you doing in my forest?" the Mistress asked. "What do you want? Is it good stone you're after? Well, take what you want, and go as fast as you can."

But Katya said:

"I don't want your dead stones. I want my living Danilo. Where have you hidden him? What right have you to lure other women's bridegrooms away?"

She was a plucky girl, look you. Stood right up to the Mistress herself! But the Mistress stood there calmly and asked:

"What else have you to say?"

"Give me back my Danilo. You've got him. . . ."

The Mistress burst out laughing and said:

"You silly wench! Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"I'm not blind," Katya shouted. "I can see. But I'm not afraid of you, bridegroom snatcher, not a bit afraid. Danilo wants to come back to me in spite of all your wiles. I know, for I've seen him. So there!"

Then the Mistress said:

"Very well then; we will see what he says himself."

Up till then it had been dark in the forest, but as she said these words it became quite light and everything seemed to come to life. The grass glowed with different fires and the trees became each more beautiful than the other. In the gaps between the trees were stone flowers with golden bees on them, like sparks of fire. So beautiful it was that you could never have your fill of it. And there running through the forest towards her was Danilo. Katya started towards him:

"Danilushko!" she shouted.

"Wait a little," said the Mistress. "Now Danilo, master-craftsman, it's for you to choose. If you go back with her, you must forget all about me. If you stay here you must forget her and the people at home. Which is it to be?"

Danilo replied:

"I cannot forget the people at home, and of her I think every minute of the day."

At this the Mistress smiled happily and said:

"He's chosen you, Katerina! Take your craftsman then. And because you've been so loyal and brave, I shall make you a gift. Let everything about me remain in Danilo's memory. But all this he

must forget absolutely." And as she said this, the clearing with the strange and beautiful flowers faded away. "Now," she said, "go back that way." And she showed them which way they must go and warned them: "You must never tell anyone about this mountain, Danilo. Say that you have been studying your craft under a master who lives a long way from here. As for you, Katerina, you must not think that I lured your man away from you. He came of his own accord, searching for the things he has now forgotten."

Katya bowed low and said:

"Forgive me for the rude things I said."

"It's no matter," said the Mistress. "What does it matter to One who's made of stone? But to you I say, don't let there be any recriminations between you."

So Katya and Danilo went back through the forest. It grew darker and darker and the ground under their feet was very uneven, a mass of little pits and hillocks. And all at once they saw that they were on top of the Gumyoshevsky mine. It was still quite early so there were no miners about yet, and they walked quietly back to the hut.

And the people who had followed Katya were still wandering about the forest, shouting to each other:

"Is she there?"

They hunted and hunted and finally gave up and went back home. And there was Danilo sitting at his window.

They were filled with terror and started back muttering exorcisms; but when they saw Danilo fill his pipe they were reassured.

They went up to the hut one by one; and there they saw Katya busying herself about the stove and looking as happy as happy could be. It was a long time since they'd seen her look like that: they'd almost forgotten how she'd used to look.

Then they grew quite bold and went in; and Katya's brothers and sisters asked:

"Where have you been all this time, Danilo?"

"I've been to Kolivan," said Danilo. "I heard tell of a stone craftsman there who was said to be the finest in Russia. So I thought I'd get him to teach me a thing or two. My late father tried to persuade me not to go, but I disobeyed him and left without anyone's knowing. The only person I told was Katya here."

"Why did you break the vase?" they asked.

"Well, what of it? One evening it happened. I'd had a drop too much to drink, maybe. And it didn't turn out as I wanted it—so I smashed it. Craftsmen, look you, are always doing things like that. That's all there was to it."

Her brothers and sisters wanted to know why Katya hadn't told them about Danilo's being at Kolivan. But they couldn't get much out of her, either. She just shut them up by saying:

"Some cows moo, but mine's a quiet one. Many a time I told you that Danilo was alive. And you—what did you do? Pushed suitors

in my path and tried to lead me astray. Come and sit down at the table now: my pancakes are just cooked. Eat, and stop talking nonsense."

And there the matter ended. The relatives sat down and ate, talked about this and that and departed. In the evening Danilo went to see the Manager. At first the Manager raged and roared and stamped his feet:

"You so-and-so! How dared you go so far away without written leave. I'll have you this and I'll give you that. . . ."

But after a bit it occurred to him that he oughtn't to be too severe on such a master craftsman as Danilo. So he softened down a bit and said:

"Don't let this happen again."

"All right," said Danilo. "I won't go away anywhere again."

So Danilo and Katya married and lived in their hut. They lived happily together, 'twas said, and in harmony. . . . A whole tribe of children were born to them. And as for his work, Danilo was reckoned to be the best craftsman in stone there was. No one could compete with him. And they prospered.

Yet now and again Danilo would fall to brooding. Katya, of course, knew what he was brooding about, but she never said anything.

THE GREAT SNAKE

THERE WAS ONCE A FELLOW AT THE WORKS CALLED LEVONTY. A VERY hard-working chap he was, and mild and timid by nature. They'd kept him at the mine (the Gumyoshevsky, that's to say) from the time he was a young man, extracting copper; and he had spent all his youth burrowing underground like an earthworm. Daylight he'd scarcely ever known and his skin had turned completely green. Well, you know what it's like down the mine. Dampness, darkness, bad air. . . . Levonty fell ill. The manager of the mine saw he was no good at the work any more and deigned to transfer him to another job—he sent him to Poskakukha to work at the State gold mine there. So Levonty became a digger. But the change of job didn't help him much, for he was now a very sick man. The manager at Poskakukha watched how he worked for a while, and then said:

"Look here, Levonty, you're a hard-working fellow and I've been talking to the owner of the mine about you: he would like to reward you for your services. 'Let him work on his own,' he said to me. 'Set him free and let him become an independent worker without obligation to pay quit-rent.'"

That is what they used to do in the old days. If a man got ill and was no more use to them, they used to set him free and make him an independent worker. So that is what happened to Levonty.

Well, a man has to eat and drink, and he's got to provide for his family, too. And how can you do it if you haven't a bit of land or anything? Levonty thought it over and decided to prospect for gold. He knew all about mining, but his tools, alas, were not much good. However he managed to get what he needed, and he said to his two small sons:

"Well, children, come and help me look for gold. It may be fortune will favour you little ones, and we shall find some gold and shan't have to beg for our living."

These children of his, now—they were still very small. Hardly more than ten years between the two of them, there was.

So off went our independent prospectors: the father who was almost too weak to walk, and the two tiny mites of children hurrying along behind him.

At that time, look you, the upper reaches of the Ryabinovka river had started yielding a løt of gold and Levonty put in an application to work there. It was a simple matter at the Mining Office in those days. All you had to do was make the application and then deliver the gold. But of course a lot of jiggery-pokery went on. There was always that. The office people noticed which districts were the most favoured for prospecting and took careful note of the yield. As soon as a district started yielding a lot of gold, they would put their paws on it. "We are going to work this ourselves," they would say: "You must go somewhere else." They made use of the prospectors as scouts to search out the land. And naturally the prospectors themselves looked after their own interests, too. They hid as much as they could of the gold they found, brought to the office only enough to show that the working was yielding, and sold the rest to secret traders. There were a good many of them, these secret traders. They were very cunning, look you, and eluded all attempts to catch them. And so the ball of deceit rolled on: the office people were trying to diddle the prospectors and the prospectors the office people. That's the way it was. And as to where the yield was really, that you could only find out on the sly.

But no one tried to deceive Levonty. They could see what sort of a prospector he would make. Let him have a bit of fun before he died, they thought.

Levonty reached the Ryabinovka river, chose a site and started work. But he was terribly weak and so tired he could hardly keep going and he could not breathe properly. And the children—well, what sort of prospectors could children make! Still they did their best. They worked away like this for a week or more and then Levonty saw that it was no good: they could never earn a living this way. What was he to do? His health was getting worse and worse, he was all skin and bone, but he was loath to hang beggars' pouches round his children's necks.

At the end of the week he went off to the office to take them the tiny scrap of gold he'd panned. Before he went he said to his sons:

"You two stay here and look after the pan. There's no point in dragging it all the way to the office and back."

So the two boys were left to guard the hut. One of them ran off to the Chusovaya river which was not far away and did a bit of fishing. He caught some minnows and perch and brought them back for supper. They had lit a fire but it was almost dark and the boys felt a bit scared.

Suddenly they saw coming towards them an old man who had once worked at the factory. They used to call him Semyonich, but what his real name was I can't remember. He'd been in the army. At one time, 'twas said, he'd been the champion worker in the refinery, but one day he'd spoken rather freely to the Manager, and the Manager had given orders to have him flogged. And this Semyonich would not submit to and when the guards tried to seize him he laid out not a few of them, for he was a hefty fellow like most of his workmates—the refinery workers being famous for their strength. But all the same they broke him in. The guards at that time were some of the toughest fellows to be found. They flogged him and, as a punishment for his mutiny, sent him away to be a soldier. Twenty years later he came back to the works, now quite an old man. During this time all his relatives had died and his hut had been boarded up—it was so ramshackle they were on the point of pulling it down altogether, when he reappeared. He mended his hut and settled down to live there quietly, all on his own. The neighbours noticed something rather odd about him, however. He had all sorts of books with him and used to sit and read them in the evenings. "He must know how to doctor people," they thought, and they went and asked him to cure their ailments. But he said: "I have no knowledge of those matters. And what cures could there be for you when your work is what it is?" Then they thought it must be some special religion he had. But it didn't seem to be that either. He went to church at Easter and on Christmas Day like the other men and didn't show signs of belonging to any special faith. Another strange thing about him there was: he didn't work and yet he had enough to live on. Of course he had a little garden and a rusty old gun and some fishing tackle, but he could hardly keep himself alive by them. And what is more he had some money. Now and again he used to give some away to people. The way he did that was queer too. You might beg him and beg him to lend you some and give him a pledge and promise him no matter how much interest on what he lent you, and he wouldn't give you anything; and yet he'd go up to someone else and say:

"Here, Ivan or Michael, take this and buy a cow with it. You've got small children and one can see you have a job to make both ends meet."

In short, he was a very strange old man. People thought he was a sorcerer—but that was chiefly on account of those books of his.

Well, along came this Semyonich and called out "Good evening" to them. The boys were very glad to see him and invited him to join them:

"Sit down, grandpa, and have some fish soup with us."

He didn't refuse their offer and sat down beside them. He tasted the soup and congratulated them—it was so well cooked and tasty. He pulled a loaf of new bread out of his knapsack, broke it into small pieces and placed it in a heap in front of the boys. They saw the old man was taken up with their soup so they applied themselves to his bread, and he kept praising the soup and saying he hadn't supped so well for a long time. The boys tucked in heartily while he was speaking and ate nearly all the old man's bread. And he smiled at them and said:

"I haven't supped so well for a long time."

Well, when they'd finished eating, the old man questioned them about their affairs. The boys told him all about themselves, how their father had been turned away from the factory and been given his freedom and how they were now working at this place. Semyonich listened in silence, only nodding his head from time to time and sighing "Oho-ho, oho-ho." When they had told him all they had to tell, he asked:

"How much gold have you panned so far?"

The boys answered:

"A zolotnik.* Maybe a little more. That's what Daddy said."

The old man got up and said:

"Well, boys, I must help you. But if I do, you mustn't tell anyone, look you. Not a word to anyone. Not one living soul. Or else . . . ." And here Semyonich looked at them in such a way that they were quite terrified; it did not seem to be Semyonich they were looking at at all. But the next minute he smiled at them again and said: "Stay here by the fire, boys, and wait till I return and I will go and speak to a certain person. Perhaps he may be able to help you. But you mustn't be afraid of him, mind, or you'll spoil everything. Don't forget that, whatever you do."

And off he went into the forest, leaving the boys by the fireside.

The two children looked at each other without saying anything. Finally the elder one took courage and said quietly:

"Don't forget, brother, we mustn't be frightened." And as he said these words, his own lips were white and his teeth were chattering.

The younger brother answered:

"No, brother, I won't be frightened," and already he was pale with fear.

So there the two of them sat and waited. Night had fallen and it was quite dark in the forest now. They could hear the ripple of the Ryabinovka river.

A long time passed and no one came and the boys lost their fear. They piled pine-needles on to the fire and made a cheerful blaze. Then all at once they heard the sound of voices in the forest. Some people are coming, they thought to themselves. Where could they be

* A zolotnik was an old Russian measure equivalent to one ninety-six thousandth part of a Russian pound.

coming from at this hour of the night? They got quite frightened again.

Then two people came up to the fire. One of them was Semyonich; the other was a man they had never seen before and he was dressed in a very outlandish way. His caftan and trousers were all yellow, look you, made of gold church brocade, and round his caftan he wore a broad patterned girdle, with a fringe also of brocade, but shot with green. His cap was yellow, with red patches on either side, and his boots were also red. His face was yellow and he had a massive beard all in tight ringlets, so tight that they looked as though they could never be combed out straight. And his eyes were green and shone like a cat's. Yet his face was kind and gentle. He was of about the same height as Semyonich, and though not fat, he seemed heavy. Wherever he stood the ground sank beneath his feet. The two children were so fascinated by the sight of him that they forgot their fear; and the strange man said jestingly to Semyonich:

"So these are the independent prospectors, are they? Take away all that they find, will they? Not leave anything for anyone else, eh?"

Then he frowned and spoke to Semyonich as if he was asking his advice:

"But shan't we corrupt these children?"

Semyonich told him that the children were good, unspoilt children but the other persisted:

"Men are all cast in the same mould. So long as they're poor and distressed, they're all right, but the moment they catch hold of my tail all sorts of nastiness sticks to them."

He stood still, thinking for a moment, and then said:

"Well, all right then, we'll try. Maybe young children will turn out to be better. But if these boys are good boys now, it will be a pity if we corrupt them. The younger one's got thin lips; I hope he won't turn out greedy. You must keep your eye on them, Semyonich. That father of theirs hasn't got long to live. I know him. One foot in the grave, and still trying to earn his bread. An independent fellow. But give him wealth and he too would be corrupted."

And he talked thus to Semyonich as if the boys were not there. Then he turned to them and said:

"Now, children, watch carefully and note where I leave my trail. Along this trail you must dig—on the surface. Don't go deep down; it won't be necessary."

And as the children looked, the man was no more; what had been the upper part of his body turned into an enormous head, and the lower part, from the waist down, became a neck. The head was just the same as it had been before, except that it was so big; the eyes had grown the size of goose's eggs; and the neck was a snake's neck. And out of the earth coiled the body of an enormous snake, so large that the head reared higher than the tallest trees of the forest. The body crept straight towards the fire, stretched over the ground and crawled, this wonder did, towards the Ryabinovka. And coil upon coil rose

up from the earth; unending they seemed. And wondrous to tell, the fire had gone out and yet it was quite light in the clearing. Not like daylight, but a different kind of light; and at the same time it became very cold. The Snake reached the Ryabinovka and crawled into the water and immediately the water froze over on this bank and on the other. The Snake crossed to the other bank, stretched out till he touched an old birch-tree and called out to the boys.

"Did you watch carefully? This is where you must dig. It will give you orphans sufficient to live on. But mind, don't be greedy!"

Having said this, the Snake melted away, as it were. Again the water murmured in the Ryabinovka; the fire thawed and burst into flame; only the grass was still frozen, as though it were covered with hoar-frost.

Semyonich said to the boys:

"That was Poloz the Great Snake. He has all the gold in his power. Wherever he goes, the gold follows. He can go on the surface of the earth or under it, whichever he likes, and he can surround any place he chooses. That is why it sometimes happens that quite a good seam will suddenly give out. Men had found it and started working it but after a while there would be some cheating or quarreling or murder committed and Poloz will draw off all the gold. Or another thing—sometimes prospectors find a rich deposit of gold-bearing sand and begin to work it, and then the Office gets to hear of it and tells them: 'You must go somewhere else. The Government is taking over this district. We're going to work this ourselves.' And they bring their machines along and drive everyone else away. And yet when they start digging they can't find any gold at all. No matter how deep or how wide afield they look for it, they can't find a scrap of gold. Just as if there had never been any there. The reason is that Poloz had been there and surrounded the place and lain there overnight and drawn all the gold inside the circle he made. But as for finding that circle, you just try!

"Poloz gets angry if there's any trickery or cheating about his gold; and what makes him most angry of all is when some man ill-treats other men. But if you're working on your own account, it's all right. He'll even help you sometimes, as he's helping you now. But mind you keep your mouths shut about this business, otherwise you'll spoil everything. And mind you don't snatch at the gold. Poloz hasn't shown you where to find it only to make you greedy. You heard what he said? Mind you remember his words. But now, go to sleep and I will stay here by the fire."

The boys did as he said and went into the hut and almost immediately fell asleep. When they woke up it was quite late and the other prospectors had already started work. The two boys looked at each other and one of them said to the other:

"Brother, did you see anything last night?"

And the other answered:

"Did you see anything?"

They talked it over and made up their minds, and swore a solemn oath that they'd never tell anyone about what they'd seen and that they'd never be greedy about gold; and then they started digging, beginning at the place where the fire had been. And straightaway, look you, they found two gold nuggets and the sand, too, was quite different from what it had been before. For some time all went very well with them. Afterwards things went askew, of course. But that will be another story.

THE SNAKE TRAIL

THOSE TWO BOYS OF LEVONTY'S—THE ONES TO WHOM POLOZ THE GREAT Snake showed his riches—became quite prosperous. A pity it was that their father died soon afterwards, for things went better and better for them. They built themselves a cottage—not an elaborate affair, to be sure, but a decent cottage; bought a cow, reared horses and sold as many as three sheep each winter. It gladdened their old mother's heart to be able to see daylight before she died.

Old Semyonich still kept an eye on them. He was their adviser in everything they did. He showed them how to dispose of the gold they found without either the office people's knowing too much or the other prospectors getting envious. You've got to keep your wits about you where gold is concerned. Everybody's watching you. Your brother prospectors are watching you; the merchant's got his hawk-eyes on you and the Office never lets you out of their sight one moment. In a word, you've got to look precious sharp. And how could you expect two little boys to manage when this sort of thing was going on? But Semyonich showed them everything. He was their guide and counsellor in all they did.

And so the boys lived. The years passed and they went on working at the same place. The other prospectors also stayed on, not finding much but still panning some gold. But the boys were much luckier. They began to lay by a little store of gold.

Unfortunately the Office got wind of the orphans being so comfortably off, and one day, a holiday it was, just as their mother was taking a fish-pie out of the oven, a messenger from the Office came running up and said:

"The Manager wants to see you. At once, he said."

They went along, and when he saw them, the Manager raged at them:

"How much longer do you think you're going to idle like this? You're grown about a mile long and you've not done a single day's work for the master. How dare you go on like this? Do you want to be put into the army?"

The boys answered:

"The master released our dead father from serfdom when he became too weak to work and so we thought. . . ."

"It's not for you to think," screamed the Manager, "bring me a legal document to prove you've been released."

Of course the boys hadn't got any such document and they didn't know what to say to this.

The Manager then said to them, however:

"Bring me five hundred roubles apiece and I'll give you one."

The reason he said this, look you, was to try and find out if the boys had got some money laid by. But they didn't fall into his trap.

The younger brother said:

"Even if we sold our house and everything we possess, that wouldn't bring in half the sum you are demanding."

"If that is so, you must start work here to-morrow morning. The overseer will tell you where to go. Yes, and mind you're not late. If you are, I'll give you your first flogging!"

The poor boys went home plunged in gloom. They told their mother what had happened and she sent up a wail:

"Oi, oi, oi. What will become of us, children! How ever shall we live now?"

Their relatives and neighbours came running up. Some advised them to write and ask the master to release them; some said they ought to go and see the mine officials in the town; some worked out how much their house and belongings would fetch if they sold them. And some frightened them still more by saying:

"While you are doing any of these things, the Office people will lay hands on you and chain you up in the mine. And once you're chained up there, just you try getting justice!"

They all gave them different advice and not one of them ever knew that the boys had perhaps five times the sum of money the Manager was asking, but were afraid to make it known. In point of fact not even their mother knew about this. For Semyonich, before he died, was always impressing on them:

"Never tell anyone about the gold you've laid by. Above all never tell any woman about it. No matter whether it's your mother or your wife or your sweetheart—never breathe a word about it. There's always a danger otherwise. The guards from the mine might come to your house, for instance, and start searching it and threatening all sorts of punishments. Women sometimes know how to hold their tongues, but when it's a question of harm coming to a son or a husband, they'll go and tell the guards where your store is—which is just what the guards want. They'll take the gold away and the man who stored it will be ruined. And as for the woman who couldn't keep her mouth shut, she'll finish up by drowning herself or putting a rope round her neck. It's happened over and over again. Beware! And when you grow up and get married mind you remember my advice. Never give your mother the slightest hint about the gold. She's weak where her tongue's concerned and fond of boasting about her children."

The boys never forgot Semyonich's counsel and didn't tell anyone

about their store. The other prospectors suspected that they had something of the sort, of course, but how much gold they had and where they kept it they had no idea.

Having given their advice and commiserated with them, the neighbours went away, thinking there was nothing for it; the boys would have to turn up at the mine next morning.

"There's no way out," they said.

As soon as they'd gone the young brother said:

"Come on, brother: let's go to the sands—if only to say goodbye."

The older one caught his meaning.

"Yes, let us go," he said. "The fresh air makes you think more clearly."

Their mother put up some pasties and cucumbers, and they took their bottle, of course, and set off towards the Ryabinovka.

They walked in silence until they reached the forest. Then the elder brother said:

"Let's hide ourselves for a bit."

They turned sharply off into the side of the forest and sat down behind some wild-rose bushes, had a drink and lay down. After a little while they heard footsteps. They looked up and saw Vanka Sochen trudging along the road. He was carrying a scoop and other tools and seemed to be going off early to the prospecting site. Such a hurry he was in, he hadn't even drunk his usual measure. Now this Sochen acted as an informer for the Office. Whenever anything wanted sniffing out they sent him to do it for them. People had had their eye on him for a long time. Many a hiding they'd given him but he still continued his dirty trade. A most pernicious creature, he was. The Mistress of the Copper Mountain herself later taught him such a lesson that he never recovered from it and died. But that is another story.

Along went this Sochen, and seeing him the brothers winked at each other. Then, a little while afterwards, the mining expert went by on horse-back. They lay down again and a little while after that Pimenov himself came along with his horse Yershik. He was riding in a little wattle cart with some fishing tackle fastened to the shaft—for all the world as if he were going fishing.

This Pimonev was a most desperate fellow after secret gold: everyone knew his Yershik, too. Yershik was a steppe horse; though small he could outrun any troika. Goodness knows where Pimenov got him from! He was said to have two sets of lungs and so to be double-winded. He could do fifty versts at a stretch if need be . . . and just try to catch him! A real robber's horse. There were all sorts of tales about him. Yes, and his master was also a powerfully built man. Man for man you wouldn't have found his equal. Not like his successors of to-day who live in that two-storied house over there!

When the boys saw this fisherman coming they smiled, and the younger one stood up among the bushes and called out—not too loudly, however:

"Ivan Vasilich, have you got your scales with you?"

The merchant saw that the lad was joking and answered in the same vein:

"In a forest like this there must be plenty to find! There must be plenty to weigh!"

Then he reined in Yershik and said:

"If you have business with me, get in. I'll take you along."

That was his habit, look you, to receive the gold in his cart. He could rely on Yershik's speed. He only had to say: "Gee up, Yershik!" and away he'd go in a cloud of dust or sending the mud flying in all directions.

The boys said: "No, we haven't got it with us," and then asked him:

"Where could we find you to-morrow morning, at daybreak?"

"What sort of business have you got for me?" he asked. "Big or small?"

"As if you didn't know. . . !"

"I know something but I don't know everything. I don't know whether it's the two of you want to buy your freedom, or only one of you to begin with."

He was silent for a moment and then said, as if warning them:

"Mind out, boys. They're keeping their eye on you. Did you see Sochen go by?"

"Of course."

"And the mining expert?"

"Him, too."

"Well, they've sent others out to watch you, too. Maybe some are interested. They know you need to get hold of some money by to-morrow morning and they're keeping a watch on you."

"Thanks for the warning. We are taking precautions though, anyway."

"Yes, I can see you're prepared, but all the same. . . . Look out!"

"Are you afraid we'll go to someone else?"

"Indeed I'm no such thing. You can rely on me. But no one else would buy from you—they wouldn't dare."

"And how much will you give us?"

Pimenov pressed them down to a low price. A veritable hawk he was—and you can't tear a hawk away from fresh meat!

"I can't give you any more than that," he said, "because it's such a risky job."

They came to terms and Pimonev whispered to them:

"I shall drive along the bank by the dam and put the money there. . . ."

He shook the reins and said: "Gee up, Yershik. Catch up that mining expert!" And as he drove off he asked:

"Shall I bring enough for the two of you or for one only?"

"We don't know yet. It depends how much we can rake together. But anyway bring half of it," the younger brother answered.

And the merchant drove off.

The brothers were silent for a while; then the younger one said:

"Maybe Pimenov was right about that: it would be a mistake to show all that money at once. It might do us harm. They'd take it all away—and where would we be then?"

"That's what I think, too," the other replied. "But what else can we do?"

"Couldn't we do this: go to the Manager and pay him our respects and ask if he couldn't lower the price a bit. We can tell him we couldn't raise more than four hundred roubles even if we sell our cottage and belongings. He'll release one of us for the four hundred roubles and people will think we've spent all we have."

"That would be all right," the elder brother said. "But which of us is to be a serf and which free? We shall have to draw lots for that, it seems."

But the other brother said coaxingly to him:

"Draw lots? Why yes, that would be a fine idea, and fun too. Only . . . don't mind my mentioning it . . . you have that defect: you're blind in one eye. And when they come to take levies for the army they won't take you, but on what grounds will they reject me? They'll have me in the army on the slightest pretext. Then I should never be free. As for you, you would suffer a little, but I'd soon pay for your release. Before a year was up, I would. I'd go to the Manager and give him whatever he asked. You needn't have a doubt of it. Haven't I got a conscience? Haven't we been fellow workers? How could I possibly fail you?"

The elder brother was called Pantelei; a kindly simple-hearted fellow he was. The sort of chap who, if you asked him to take off his shirt and give it to you, would do so. This defect of his, this blind eye, cast him down terribly, poor fellow. He was always very quiet and tongue-tied in company and acted as if everyone else was stronger and cleverer than himself.

Kostka, the younger brother, was a very different type. For all that his childhood had been spent in poverty, he grew up so tall and straight that he was like a soldier on parade. A big, vigorous fellow, he was. Just one thing was wrong with his appearance—his hair was red, bright red, look you. People called him 'Kostka the Red' behind his back. And he was a cunning one: everyone who had dealings with him used to say: "You can't trust what Kostka says. On occasion he swallows his words!" He was a past master at insinuating himself with people. A real fox, always swishing his brush.

Kostka soon brought his brother to his way of thinking, so all was done as he suggested. The Manager let them off one hundred roubles and the next day Kostka was given his release. He claimed to have got a concession for Pantelei, too: the Manager would send him to Krilatovsk to prospect instead of putting him down the mine.

"Your brother was quite right," the Manager said to Pantelei. "You'll be more used to the work there. There's a lot to do in the

sands. And anyway we need men both here and there, so I'll make this concession—you can go to Krilatovsk."

So Kostka arranged matters. He made sure of his own release from serfdom and got his brother sent off to prospect a long way off. He made a pretence of having to sell their house and their belongings but of course he had no intention of doing any such thing really.

When Pantelei had been sent away, Kostka made ready for work on the Ryabinovka river. But how could he hope to carry on all by himself? He would have to engage someone to help him. And he was frightened to do that. Other people might find out about the gold there and come and prospect in the same place. However, he got hold of a half-wit, a big fellow with a small brain, who hadn't wits enough to count up to ten. He was just what Kostka wanted.

He started work with his new assistant, but it wasn't long before he saw that the sand was no longer yielding. Kostka rushed this way and that; he tried higher up, lower down, on this side and on that; it made no difference, there was no gold. A bit here and there he did find, but it wasn't worth while going on working. And so Kostka hit on the idea of trying the other side of the river—to strike under the birch-tree where Poloz the Great Snake had stopped. Here he had a bit more luck, but things did not go as well as when Pantelei was with him. All the same he was very pleased with himself and thought: "I've outwitted Poloz."

Seeing Kostka on the other side of the Ryabinovka, other prospectors came and tried their luck there. They must have found some gold, too, for before a month was up a whole colony of them had assembled there—all sorts of people from other parts.

And in one of these groups Kostka caught sight of a young girl. She too had red hair, and she was slender in form and just the girl to suit him. The sort of girl, in fact, that'll make a rainy day seem sunny. Now Kostka was a nasty fellow where women were concerned; he might have been a manager or even an owner. Many a girl from a good home had cried her heart out on his account. And here was a girl prospector. Kostka rushed up to her and was captivated at once.

The girl was quite young, her outfit was poor, yet Kostka couldn't get anywhere near her. Talk about a girl having spirit in her! For every word you gave her, she'd give you back two—and biting ones at that! And as for touching her, you'd better not even think of it. Well, Kostka started nibbling at her like a carp at a piece of bread.

His life became a misery; sleep and peace of mind left him. But the girl led him on and on.

There are girls who are masters at this sort of thing. Goodness knows where they learn it from! To look at them you'd think that only yesterday they were children, and yet they know all the tricks. Kostka had had his way with many another girl, but now he had to sing a different tune.

"Will you marry me?" he asked her. "I mean marry me properly, legally, not just anyhow. . . . I'll buy your release if you will."

But she, look you, she just laughed at him:

"I might if your hair weren't red!"

Kostka didn't like people talking about his red hair. The mention of it stabbed him like a knife. But he answered in the same jesting tone:

"Why, haven't you got red hair yourself?"

"Yes," said she, "and that's why I'd be frightened to marry you. You've got red hair and I've got red hair—our children would be regular little furnaces!"

Sometimes she used to start singing Pantelei's praises. It seemed that she knew him. Had met him at Krilatovsk or something.

"If Pantelei now were to come and court me, I'd marry him all right! I remember him very well. A nice boy, he is. Even if he has only one eye, he can see well with it."

She said this purposely to tease Kostka, but he thought she was in earnest and ground his teeth together as fiercely as if he wanted to tear Pantelei to pieces. She continued:

"Why don't you buy your brother's release? You prospered when you were together. And now look: you're free and he's been sent to the most awful place imaginable."

"I haven't enough money for him," he told her. "He'll have to earn enough to buy his own release."

"Ekh! You shameless rogue," she said to him. "Did Pantelei do any less work than you when he was with you? Where was it he lost that eye of his, eh? I suppose you'll tell me it was at the mine he lost it!"

She got Kostka so worked up that in the end he exclaimed:

"I'll kill him, the carrion!"

This made no impression on her.

"What would happen then, I don't know, but I do know that I'd never marry a Red-head. Never in my life. Red-heads are good for nothing! What could be worse?"

Like this, she snubbed Kostka, but the more she did so the more he ran after her. He'd have given her everything he had to make her stop calling him 'Red-head' and be nice to him. But she wouldn't accept his presents. Not the smallest one of them. She only pricked him still more by saying:

"You ought to have saved the money you spent on this for releasing Pantelei."

One day Kostka hit on the idea of holding a party for the other prospectors.

"When they've all had too much to drink, everyone will be fuddle-headed," he said to himself. "Then will be the time. I'll get her alone with me somewhere and next day you see if she doesn't change her tune!"

The other prospectors said:

"Our Red-head's all of a fever. He must have made a lucky strike. We must try our luck on his site."

That was what they thought—and who would refuse a feast he doesn't have to pay for himself? And this girl—she came along too. She danced as Kostka's partner, and a wonderful dancer she was, so they say. Kostka was quite enraptured by her.

But he didn't give up his plan. As soon as his guests had had a good deal to drink, he tried to carry her off. But she gave him such a look with those eyes of hers that somehow or other his hands dropped to his sides, his legs trembled and he felt quite frightened.

And she said:

"Shameless Red-head! Are you going to buy Pantelei's release?"

These words scalded Kostka like boiling water. He flew into a rage:

"Never! Never!" he screamed. "I'd rather spend every kopeck I have on drink!"

"Well, that is your affair," said the girl. "Be it as you will then. We will help you to do so."

And with these words she danced away from him. She twisted and coiled her body just like a snake, and yet her eyes never left his face for one instant.

After this Kostka held a party almost every week. And it was no small expense for him, look you, getting enough drink for half a hundred people to get merry on. Prospectors are adepts at this sort of thing. And it couldn't be done on nothing, or else they'd have jeered at him:

"Although there was nothing but empty glasses to drink at Kostka's party, we had a head-ache for a week. Next time he invites us, we'd better bring a couple of bottles along with us, I reckon."

So Kostka did his best to provide plenty of wine and so forth. He very soon spent all the money he had with him and there was very little gold coming in now. It had practically dried up, in fact. Even the half-wit whom he'd got to work for him, kept saying:

"Queer thing, master, but there don't seem to be no sparkles in the washings now."

But this girl now, she mocked him:

"What's the matter, Red-head? Worn your shoes out and can't afford to get them mended?"

Kostka had known for some time that he was spending much more than he could afford, but he couldn't stop himself. "You wait!" he thought to himself. "I'll show you if I can afford to get my shoes mended or not!"

He and Pantelei had a tidy store of gold. It was buried in the ground, look you. In their own garden, it was, a couple of spades deep. Shovel away a couple of spades-full of earth and you found a layer of sand and clay. And that was where they'd put their gold. The spot had been carefully marked and measured to the last inch. Even the mine watchmen could have no cause for complaint; they had their answer ready:

"Found some gold there, you say! Well, fancy its being so close!

We've been going all that long way to look for it and there was some in our own garden the whole time!"

This treasure of theirs was in quite a safe place, look you, but it was troublesome to get at it. Against this they had also provided. And the spot had been well concealed too. It was behind the bath-house and they'd planted bushes all round it and piled stones on top. In a word, it was well protected.

So Kostka chose a dark night and went out to look at their treasure. He found the place where it was buried, dug up the top soil, filled his bucket with the sand and took it into the bath-house where he had some water ready. He shut the window, lit a lantern and started washing the sand. But it was no use: not one grain of gold appeared. "What's this?" he thought to himself. "Can I have made a mistake?" And he went out again. He re-measured everything and dug up another bucketful, but not a trace of gold was to be seen. Here Kostka cast caution aside and rushed out with the lantern. He examined the place in the light. All was quite as it should be. He had taken the top layer off the right spot. He started digging again. Maybe he hadn't dug deep enough yet. A little gold appeared, but it was only a tiny scrap. Kostka went on digging still deeper; the same thing happened: there was hardly a sparkle to be seen. Kostka was beside himself and started working away as if he were prospecting. But after a little while he had to stop: he'd reached a layer of solid rock. He was pleased when he saw this, as not even Poloz himself could take away the gold through rock. "It must be somewhere near," he said. But all at once the thought struck him: "Pantelei must have taken it!"

Just as this thought entered his head, the girl appeared, that prospector girl. It was quite dark still, yet he could see her in every detail quite distinctly. Tall and straight, she stood at the very edge of the hole he'd dug and stared at him.

"What, lost it all, Red-head? And blaming your brother for it? He will have the gold, but all you will be allowed to do is to see it."

"Who asked you to come here, you goggle-eyed carrion?"

Kostka seized hold of the girl's legs and pulled her down into the hole with him with all his might. The girl fell, yet remained upright. Then she grew taller and thinner and turned into a snake, coiling round Kostka's shoulders and sliding down his back. Kostka was terrified and let go of the snake's tail which he was clutching in his hand. And as the snake's head burrowed in the rock, sparks flew and scattered and a blinding light shone.

The snake slid through the rock and all along its trail gold glittered —now in tiny grains, now in big nuggets. Heaps of it, there was. And when Kostka saw all this he fell headlong, crashing his head against the rock. And 'twas there in the hole that his mother found him next morning. His head hadn't been badly injured but it had been enough to kill him.

When the day of the funeral came, they let Pantelei come from

Krilatovsk. When he saw the hole dug in the garden he thought at once: "Something's happened to our gold." Pantelei was worried about it. He'd been counting on that gold of theirs to buy his release, look you. Although he had heard some tales about his brother, he'd always believed Kostka would buy him out.

He went and had a look at the hole. He bent over it and from below someone seemed to be shining a light at him. He looked more carefully and at the bottom was what looked like a round window made out of very thick glass, and through this little window he could see a winding path of gold. And from it a girl was looking up at him. A red-haired girl she was, with big black eyes, look you; terrifying to gaze into they were. Yet the girl was smiling at him, and pointing her finger at the golden path as if to say: "This is your gold; take it. Don't be afraid." She seemed to be speaking kindly to him, yet he could hear no words. And then the light went out.

At first Pantelei was a bit scared. Must have been a hallucination, he thought to himself. Then he plucked up courage and climbed down into the hole to look. There was no glass to be seen there, but there was a great deal of some white stone. Quartz it was—a kind of stone he'd often come up against on the State prospecting site, so that he was used to it, and knew how to tackle it. But then he thought to himself:

"Well, why not have a try? Maybe there really is some gold here."

He collected the tools he wanted and started hewing at the rock just in the place where he'd seen the path of gold. And sure enough, there was gold in the stone—and not just a little sparkling dust, but big grains and nests of it. 'Twas a rich seam he'd hit on. By evening he'd brought up six or seven pounds of pure gold.

He took the gold along secretly to Pimenov and then went and saw the manager again. The manager said:

"You know the price. Give me five hundred roubles and I'll release you."

So he managed to squeeze another hundred out of Pantelei. Of course Pantelei wouldn't bargain.

"Bark now, you cur," Pantelei thought, "but one of these days you'll choke."

And so Pantelei got his freedom. He did a little more digging in the hole in the garden, and then gave up looking for gold altogether.

"I shall live more peacefully without it," he thought to himself.

After Kostka's death, everybody at the mine started asking:

"What's happened to that dancer of ours?"

But she had completely disappeared. They started asking each other: "Where did she come from?" Some said she was from Kungurka, others that she'd been working at the Mramor quarry. In fact everyone said something different. Prospectors are known to be a wandering crowd. . . . It's little use trying to find out who they are or who their parents were. So people soon stopped asking questions about her.

But there was gold to be found on the banks of the Ryabinovka for quite a long time.

THE FIRE-FAIRY

ONCE A BAND OF PROSPECTORS WERE SITTING ROUND A FIRE IN THE middle of the forest: four men and a small boy, about eight years old he would be, not more. Fedya was his name.

It was long past bed-time but the talk was lively and they were loath to turn in. One of them, look you, was an old man. Grandfather Efim they called him. From his early youth he'd been digging for gold and many were the adventures he'd had. Now he was telling his stories and the others were listening spellbound.

Several times Fedya's father had said:

"It's time you went to sleep, Fedyunka!"

But the little boy was eager to listen and begged his father:

"Please let me stay a little longer, Daddy."

Well, presently Grandpa Efim finished the story he was telling. The fire had almost gone out and there were only a few red embers left; and the men sat round gazing at them.

All of a sudden, from out of the middle of the embers hopped a tiny little girl. Just like a doll she was—but alive. Her hair was red, her dress pale blue, and in her hand was a kerchief, also blue.

The little girl looked at them with merry eyes, smiling and showing her white teeth. She put one hand on her hip, waved the kerchief with the other and started to dance. And so nimbly and lithely she danced, you can scarcely imagine it. It fairly took the prospectors' breath away. They gazed and gazed at her . . . without uttering a word. It was as if they were lost in thought.

First the little girl danced in a ring around the fire; then, as this didn't give her room enough, she made a wider circle. The prospectors moved back to make way for her, and as she completed the circle she seemed to grow a little taller.

The prospectors moved further back. She made another circle and grew a little taller still. Then they moved quite a way further back and she danced in the spaces between the men, describing loops around them. Finally she danced off beyond them, now going round in a perfect circle and growing as tall as Fedya himself. She stopped at a tall pine tree, stamped her foot, waved the kerchief, smiled, and made a sort of whistling sound:

"Tu-whit! Tu-whu-u-u!"

At that moment an owl hooted and laughed and the little girl vanished.

If it had only been the four men there, probably nothing more would have been heard of it. For they each thought to themselves:

"That's what comes of gazing at the fire. Your eyes get misty

. . . There's no knowing what you may think you see when you're sleepy!"

But Fedya didn't think this, and he asked his father:

"Daddy, who was that?"

His father answered:

"An owl, of course. What else could it have been? Didn't you hear it hoot?"

"I didn't mean the owl. I know what owls are all right; I'm not afraid of them. But who was that little girl?"

"What little girl?"

"The one that danced in the fire, and made you all move back so as to give her a wider circle."

His father and the other prospectors told the boy to tell them what he'd seen. He did so and then one of them said:

"And how big was she, this girl?"

"First of all she was no bigger than the palm of my hand but at the end she was nearly as big as I am."

Then the prospector said:

"Well, Fedya, I saw just the same wonder myself."

Fedya's father and another of the prospectors said they had seen it too. The only one who said nothing, but just puffed away at his pipe, was old Grandpa Efim. They questioned him:

"What have you got to say about this, Grandpa Efim?"

"I say that I saw it, too," he answered. "I thought I must have dreamed it, but it seems that it really was the Dancing Fire-fairy that appeared to us."

"And who is this Dancing Fire-fairy?"

Grandpa Efim told them.

It seems he had heard from old folk that sometimes there was a sign to show where gold could be found: a kind of little fairy girl who danced. Wherever this Fire-fairy danced, gold lay hidden. Not big veins and deposits but little nuggets planted in the earth like radishes. There'd be a wide ring of them on top and they'd grow less and less as you dug deeper until they disappeared. Once you'd dug up this surface gold, it was no use going any deeper: there'd be no more to be found. But what Grandpa Efim couldn't remember was whether you had to search at the spot where she popped out or where she disappeared.

The other prospectors said:

"Leave it to us. To-morrow morning we'll dig a hole at the place where the fire was, and afterwards we can test the ground under the pine tree as well. Then we'll be able to see if there's any sense in your story or whether it's just a lot of nonsense."

And with that they lay down and went to sleep. Fedya curled up to go to sleep too, but he kept thinking:

"Why did the owl laugh like that?"

He wanted to ask Grandpa Efim about it, but he was already asleep and snoring.

The next morning Fedya didn't wake up till late. When he did wake he saw that the men had dug a big hole at the place where the fire had been. Each one of the four men was standing beside a different pine-tree and each was saying the same thing:

"This is the place where she disappeared."

But Fedya shouted:

"What are you thinking of, little uncles? Don't you remember? It was this pine tree over here where the Fire-fairy stopped. It was here that she stamped her foot."

The prospectors were discouraged:

"Now he's woken up and says it was a fifth tree. And if there were ten of us, we'd all ten say different trees. It's no use going on. We'll have to give it up."

They did dig under all five trees all the same, but they didn't find any gold, and Grandpa Efim said to Fedya:

"Fortune has deceived you, it seems."

Fedya didn't like his saying this. He answered:

"It's all the fault of that owl. It hooted and laughed our luck away."

"It was nothing to do with the owl!" Grandpa Efim said.

"Yes, it was!"

"No, it wasn't!"

"Yes, it was!"

They went on squabbling over it like this; the other prospectors just laughed at them and at themselves for their folly and said:

"Neither the old man nor the boy knows who's right and here are we wasting time listening to 'em."

After this they nicknamed the old man Efim Golden Radish and Fedya Fedyunka Fire-fairy.

The boys at the Settlement soon got to know about it and didn't give him any peace. Whenever he went by, they would shout:

"Fedyunka Fire-fairy! Fedyunka Fire-fairy! Tell us about the little girl! Tell us about the little girl!"

To an old man what's the harm in a nickname? You can call him a pot as long as you don't put him on the fire! But Fedya, being young, was affronted. Many a time he squabbled and shouted and fought with the other children, but they only teased him the more. And he hated to go home from the prospecting field. And another change took place in his life: his father married again and his stepmother turned out to be a regular she-bear. So now Fedyunka was quite cut off from home.

Grandpa Efim didn't often go home either. After the long week's work he didn't feel inclined to drag his old legs so far. Besides, he'd no one to go home to, for he lived by himself.

So it came about that when the other prospectors went off home of a Saturday, Efim and Fedya stayed behind on the site.

What was there for them to do? They talked about one thing and another. Grandpa Efim told him all kinds of stories and taught

him which were the best places to look for gold, and so on. Sometimes they talked about the Fire-fairy too. And the time passed in smooth, friendly fashion. There was only one thing they couldn't agree about: Fedya insisted that it was the owl that had prevented their finding any gold and Grandpa Efim said that the owl had nothing to do with it.

One evening they were arguing about this. It was still daylight and the sun was shining but they had lit a fire beside their shed to keep the gnats away. The fire itself could scarcely be seen but there was a great deal of smoke. As they were gazing at the fire, suddenly, in the middle of the smoke, the little girl appeared. Just as she'd been before she was, except that the shawl was a darker colour and the kerchief also. She looked at them with merry eyes, smiling and showing her white teeth; then she waved her kerchief, stamped her little foot and began to dance.

First she danced in little circles, then in larger and larger ones. And at the same time she gradually grew taller. The prospectors' shed was in her way, but she took no notice of it and just danced on as though it wasn't there. She danced round and round until she'd grown as tall as Fedya and then she stopped, as before, at a tall pine tree. She grinned, stamped her foot, waved her kerchief in the air and made a sort of whistling sound:

"Tu-whit! Tu-whu-u-u!"

And the next moment an owl hooted and laughed. Grandpa Efim couldn't make it out:

"What a strange thing to hear an owl in broad daylight!"

And Fedya said:

"There you are, you see. That owl's gone and spoilt our luck again. It must have frightened the Fire-fairy away."

"Did you see the Fire-fairy just now?"

"Yes, didn't you?"

They questioned each other about what they'd seen, and both said the same. The only thing they couldn't agree about was which tree it was the Fire-fairy had disappeared under.

At this point the old man sighed and said:

"It's all a lot of nonsense, to be sure. We just imagined it all!"

Just as he said this, they noticed some smoke issuing from the shed. They ran to see what it was and found that one of the boards had caught fire. There was some water nearby so they were able to put it out, and the only thing that had got burnt was the old man's mittens. When Fedya picked these mittens up, he noticed a lot of little holes in them. They looked just like tiny foot-prints. He showed Grandpa Efim the holes and said:

"And I suppose you'll say we imagined this, too?"

And now Grandpa Efim had to admit he'd been wrong:

"You are right, Fedyunka. 'Tis a sure sign that the Fire-fairy has been here. We must dig some more holes to-morrow and try our luck again."

So the next morning, Sunday it was, they set to digging. They dug three big holes—but all to no purpose. And Grandpa Efim said sadly:

"A fine joke our treasure-hunt will be for the others!"

But Fedya still put all the blame on the owl:

"It was that old goggle-eyed creature hooted and laughed our luck away. What wouldn't I give to lay hands on it!"

When the men came back to work on Monday they saw the new holes that had been dug and at once tumbled to what they'd been at and began teasing old Efim:

"So old Radish has been looking for radishes!"

But when they saw that there'd been a fire in the shed, they fairly raged at the pair of them. Fedya's father was furious with him and would have given him a thrashing, but Efim stopped him:

"You ought to be ashamed at yourself swearing at the lad like that. Isn't it enough that he can't even go home, because your new wife makes his life a misery? Besides, why should it be his fault? I was here, too, wasn't I? It's to me you must complain if any damage has been done. Some sparks flew out of my pipe—that's what caused the fire. I'm the one to blame for it."

He chided Fedya's father in this way, and then turned to Fedya and spoke to him just as if the others weren't there:

"Ah, Fedyunka, Fedyunka. That Fire-fairy has been making fun of us. If we see her again, we must spit in her face! A fine one she is—leading people astray and making them look foolish!"

But Fedya still maintained:

"It wasn't her doing, Grandpa. It was that owl that spoilt everything."

"Well, you may do as you wish," said Efim, "but you won't get me to dig any more holes. Once bitten twice shy, I say. I'm too old to go dancing after this Fire-fairy."

The old man grumbled on like this, but Fedya still stood up for the Fire-fairy:

"Please don't be angry with her, Grandpa! Just think how beautifully she danced! She would have brought us fortune if it hadn't been for that owl."

Grandpa Efim didn't grumble about the owl but he had nothing but rude words for the Fire-fairy:

"A fine load of fortune she's brought you! You can't even go to your father's house!"

But no matter how much he railed at her, Fedya still said:

"But oh, Grandpa, how beautifully she did dance!"

"What if she did dance well—it doesn't make any odds to us. I never want to set eyes on her again!"

"I'd like to set eyes on her this very minute," sighed Fedya. And he went on: "And would you turn away? Wouldn't you like to watch her, Grandpa?"

"What do you mean, wouldn't I like to watch her?" Efim shouted,

and he flew into a furious temper with Fedya. "Lord, you are a stubborn, obstinate little creature. Once you get an idea into your head, nothing will shake it out again! Well, it's your own look-out if you'll go and spend your whole life running after treasure when it may not even be there."

"But how can it not be there when I saw the Fire-fairy with my own eyes?"

"You please yourself, but you won't catch me running with you. I've had enough of it. My old legs won't stand for it."

They argued away like this, yet they never ceased to be good friends. Grandpa Efim taught the boy how to prospect and showed him all sorts of tricks of the trade, and in the evenings he told him stories. In a word he taught him how to live. And the days when they were left alone on the prospecting site were the happiest of all.

Winter sent the prospectors scurrying home. The Works Manager gave them various jobs to do; but Fedya, being too young, had to stay at home. He was very miserable there. And another misfortune befell him: his father had an accident at the Works and was crippled. He was taken to the hospital and lay there neither dead nor alive. And after this Fedya's step-mother became more bearish than ever and took to mauling the little fellow. He bore it as long as he could; then he said:

"I've made up my mind to go and live with Grandpa Efim."

As to the step-mother—what did it matter to her?

"You can go and live with your Fire-fairy for all I care," she screamed at him.

Fedya put on his felt boots and tightened the belt of his ragged sheepskin coat. He would have liked to put on his father's cap, too, but his step-mother wouldn't let him. So he put on his own—which was much too small for him—and set out for Grandpa Efim's.

As soon as he was outside in the street the other boys came running up to tease him:

"Fedyunka Fire-fairy! Fedyunka Fire-fairy! Tell us about the little girl!"

But this time Fedya took no notice. All he said was:

"Oh what silly little fools you are!"

The boys were ashamed and asked him quite kindly:

"Where are you going?"

"To Grandpa Efim's."

"What, to old Golden Radish?"

"To you he's a radish but to me he's a grandfather."

"But it's a long way from here. You'll get lost."

"I know the way all right!"

"But you'll freeze! A frost like this and you haven't got any mittens!"

"Maybe I haven't, but I've got hands and my coat-sleeves haven't fallen off. I can put my hands in my coat-sleeves—that's all I need to do. That never occurred to you, I suppose!"

The other children were impressed by what Fedya said and started questioning him in quite friendly fashion:

"Fedyunka! Is it true that you've seen the Fire-fairy?"

"I've seen her in fire and I've seen her in smoke and it may be that I'll see her in other places too—but I haven't time to talk about it now," Fedya said, and he went his way.

Grandpa Efim lived part of the time in Kosoy Brod and part in Severny. His house was on the edge of the forest and right against the window stood a pine tree in which was a swarm of bees. 'Twas a long way and the weather was bitter cold—it was right in the middle of winter. And Fedyunka was half-frozen. But he kept on and reached the house in the end. But just as he was putting his hand on the door-handle, he suddenly heard:

"Tu-whit! Tu-whu-u-u!" behind him.

He turned round. The snow was whirling down and in amongst it there was a ball of snow that somehow looked like the Fire-fairy. Fedya ran up to look at it more closely but the snowball had already hopped some distance away. Fedya ran after it, but it hopped on further. He ran and ran until he found himself in a place he'd never seen before. It was a glade of some kind with dense forest all round. In the middle of the glade was an old birch tree. Very old it was, and seemingly dead, and the snow was heaped up all around it. The snowball he was chasing hopped towards this birch tree and circled round and round it.

Fedya was so excited he didn't notice that there was no path and plodded straight on through the snow.

"Having come so far, I'm not going back," he thought. But when at last he managed to reach the birch tree, the snowball fell to pieces and the snow dust flew into his eyes.

Fedya was ready to cry with vexation. All of a sudden, at his very feet, the snow melted down to the very ground, forming a kind of well, and at the bottom of it Fedya saw the Fire-fairy! She had the same merry look in her eyes; she smiled sweetly at him, waved her kerchief and started to dance, and wherever she trod the snow vanished. On every spot her foot touched, green grass and flowers sprang up.

The Fire-fairy danced round him, and as she did so Fedya became quite warm. Then she made wider circles, and each time she went round she grew taller and the gap in the snow grew wider and wider. The leaves of the birch tree started rustling and she danced away, singing:

"I have warmth!
I have light!
I have lovely summer-time!"

And she spun round and round like a top, her dress a big bubble.

By the time she'd grown as tall as Fedya, the gap in the snow was quite big and little birds were singing in the birch tree. It was as hot as a summer day. Sweat was pouring down Fedya's face. He'd

taken off his cap and would have liked to take off his sheepskin coat, too, but the Fire-fairy said:

"No, my lad, you must conserve the heat. You have the journey back to think about."

To which Fedya answered:

"'Twas you who brought me here—you must take me back again!"

The Fire-fairy laughed at this:

"Clever, aren't you! But maybe I haven't the time!"

"Oh, you'll have time all right. I'll wait till you do!"

But the girl said:

"You'd better take the spade. It will keep you warm and lead you home."

Fedya looked up and there by the birch tree lay an old spade. It was very rusty and the handle was broken.

He picked it up and the Fire-fairy said:

"Mind you don't let go of it! Keep it tightly in your hand. And notice which way you go, for the spade won't be able to take you back here again. And in the spring you'll come back here, eh?"

"Of course I will. Grandpa Efim and I will come. As soon as spring comes, we'll be here. But you'll come and dance for us, won't you?"

"I shan't have time. You must do the dancing yourself—and Grandpa Efim can do the stamping!"

"Why, what work have you to do?"

"Can't you see? I turn winter into summer to amuse workers like yourself. Do you think that's easy to do?"

So saying, she laughed, spun round like a top, waved her kerchief and whistled:

"Tu-whit! Tu-whu-u-u!"

And with that she vanished; the gap in the snow was no more; the birch tree stood there bare and lifeless. An owl was sitting in its topmost branches. It didn't hoot or make any sound, but just shook its noddle from side to side. Around the tree were huge snowdrifts. Fedya sank into them almost up to his neck and he shook the spade angrily at the owl. All that remained of the Fire-fairy's summer was the warmth in the handle of the spade. Burning hot it was to the touch, His arms and whole body were warmed by it.

The spade gave a tug at his hand and instantly pulled him out of the snow. It was all he could do to hold on to it at first; but after a while he got used to it and things went better. Now he walked quietly after the spade, now he had to run after it as fast as he could. Fedya was delighted by it, yet he did not forget to mark the trail so that he could find his way back in the spring. And this too was made easy for him, for whenever he wanted to make some notches on a tree, the spade would hop into the air and snip-snip! two neat little notches would be cut.

It was dark when the spade brought Fedya to old Efim's house and the old man had already climbed up on to the stove to sleep. Natur-

ally he was very pleased to see Fedya, and asked him why he'd come and where he'd come from. Fedya told him all that had happened, but the old man wouldn't believe him at first. So Fedya said:

"Well, just take a look at the spade then! I've put it in the shed."

Efim picked up the spade and examined it, and there embedded in the rust, were little golden beetles. Six of them there were.

After this Grandpa Efim was inclined to believe the boy's story.

"Could you find the place again?" he asked.

"Of course I could. I've marked the way," answered Fedya.

So the next morning Grandpa Efim borrowed some skis from a hunter he knew and said:

"Well, come along then, Fedyunka: we can have a try anyway."

They found the way all right. It was quite easy thanks to the notches. Grandpa Efim had quite cheered up. He'd sold the gold from the spade to a secret trader and they were able to live all through the winter secure from want.

When the spring came, they went back to the old birch-tree and dug there. And what do you think? With the first spade-full out came sand so rich there was no need to wash it; you could pick out the gold with your hand. Grandpa Efim fairly danced with joy. Never in his life had he seen such sand.

But of course they couldn't keep their good luck hidden. Fedya was a child and Grandpa Efim, old though he was, was simple-hearted. Very soon rumours got around about their find:

"Fedyunka Fire-fairy has made a lucky strike." And people streamed in from every direction. And soon afterwards Fedya and old Efim and the other prospectors were all driven away and the Master took over the site.

So it wasn't for nothing that the owl had shaken its head. It had good cause to do so. The prospectors didn't get the Fire-fairy's gold. The vein turned out to be a rich one and lasted for many a year.

Still, Grandfather Efim and Fedya got a mouthful or two from the first scoopings. They did get something out of it. And it made life easy for them for five years or so.

Fedya's father had died before the lucky day. His stepmother brought Fedya beer and spoke nicely to him, asked him to come home and be the master of the house. But Fedya wasn't to be fooled:

"Manage the house as best you can. You go your way and Grandpa Efim and I will go ours!"

Fedya and Grandpa Efim often talked about the Dancing Fire-fairy:

"If only we could see her once again!"

But she never appeared to them again. The site of that goldfield is known as Fire-fairy Field to this day. You've heard of it, I expect —or maybe you're not old enough.

Where the Fire-fairy dances now—that I can't tell you. You must look for her yourselves. Your young eyes can see better than my old ones.

GOLDEN HAIR

IT WAS IN THE OLD DAYS. RUSSIANS HAD NEVER BEEN HEARD OF IN these parts then; and there weren't any Bashkirs round here either. The Bashkirs wanted feeding-grounds for their cattle, look you. They wanted broad glades and steppe lands. Over at Uraim, on the banks of the Nyazyi, there were plenty such, but not here. Nowadays the forest's just a speck on the horizon, but in those days it was so thick you couldn't even walk through it, let alone ride, and the only people who ever entered it were the hunters.

There was a certain Bashkir hunter called Ailip. The most daring hunter they had, he was. Bears he would kill with a single arrow; deer he'd seize by the antlers and throw over his shoulder, finishing them off that way; and as for wolves and suchlike animals, not one ever got away once he'd set eyes on him.

Well, one day this Ailip was riding through a forest glade when he suddenly saw a fox. For a great hunter like him a fox was a very unimportant quarry; but this time he said to himself: "I'll have a bit of fun: I'll kill it with my whip."

He galloped after the fox but could not catch up with it. Finally he drew his bow to shoot it . . . but the fox disappeared, "Well, that's that," he said to himself. "It's got away: good luck to it."

He was thinking this when the fox poked its head up from behind a tree stump and barked, just as if it were mocking him: "As if you could hit me!"

Ailip drew his bow again, but the fox vanished. Yet hardly had his arrow sped than it poked its head up again and barked: "As if you could hit me!"

This made Ailip fly into a fury: "Just you wait, Red-hair!" he said.

He had reached the end of the glade and there was nothing but dense, thick forest ahead; but that didn't stop him. He jumped off his horse and ran after the fox on foot. But it was no use: there it was quite close, yet he couldn't shoot it. Nor did he wish to go back. What, a hunter like him and not able to kill a fox! So he went on and on and finally reached a part of the forest he'd never been in before. And the fox had completely vanished. Try as he would, he couldn't find it again.

"Well," he thought to himself, "I'd better find out where I am."

He picked out the tallest larch-tree and climbed up to the top of it. He looked all round and saw a hill not far away, with a river running down the side of it. It was a small river, babbling merrily against the rocks and stones, but in one place it was shining so brightly that it quite dazzled his eyes. "What can it be?" he thought to himself. He looked again and there, sitting on a big white stone by some bushes, was a young girl of the most marvellous beauty. Her hair was thrown over her shoulder and dangled down in the water. It was the colour

of gold, this hair of hers, and quite ten sazhens in length; and the reflection of it in the river was so brilliant that you could scarcely bear to look at it.

As Ailip was gazing at this girl, she suddenly raised her head and said:

"Good day to you, Ailip! My nanny, the fox, has often told me about you. It seems that you are the biggest and handsomest and strongest and cleverest of all the hunters. Will you marry me?"

"What payment would I have to give for you?"*

"Payment! What question can there be of payment? My father owns all the gold there is. Besides he will not let me go of his own accord. We shall have to run away, if you are brave and clever enough, that is."

Ailip was beside himself with joy. He climbed down the tree and ran over to where the girl was sitting and said:

"If you really will it so, then I am yours heart and soul. I will carry you away from here and no one shall take you from me."

At that moment the fox barked near the very stone the girl was sitting on, thrust its little snout into the ground and rose up a withered old woman, who said to him:

"Ekh, Ailip, those are idle words you are speaking! You boast of your strength and luck, yet you couldn't even hit me with your arrows!"

"You are right," Ailip answered. "But 'twas the first time in my life I've been so clumsy."

"First time or not, what has to be done now will be more difficult. This girl is the daughter of the Great Snake, Poloz. Golden Hair is her name. Her tresses are of pure gold and she's chained to this place by them. She has to sit here and dangle her hair in the river and cannot lessen its weight. Try and lift her tresses up and then you'll see if you're strong enough to carry her away."

Now Ailip was famed for his strength. He pulled her tresses out of the river and wound them round his body. Several times he wound them, and then he said to the girl:

"Now, my dear little bride, Golden Hair, we are bound together tightly by your hair. No one on earth will be able to part us."

And with these words he took Golden Hair in his arms and carried her away. The old woman ran after him and thrust some scissors into his hand.

"Take these with you, Nimble-Wit," she said.

"What use would they be to me? I've got a knife, haven't I?" said Ailip, and he would not have taken the scissors, but his bride, Golden Hair, said:

"Take them. They may come in useful, if not to you then to me."

So Ailip set off into the forest. He had noted which direction to take when he was up the larch-tree. At first he walked along quite jauntily, but the girl felt very heavy, strong though he was—and he was

* Among the Bashkirs it was the custom to buy one's bride from her father.

of no ordinary strength, this Ailip. Golden Hair saw he was growing tired and said:

"Let me walk and you carry my hair. 'Twill be easier so. We must hurry or my father will catch me and draw me back again."

"How could he draw you back?" Ailip asked.

"By a power he has been endowed with. Any gold he wants he can draw into the earth. If he wanted to take my hair, nothing could prevent him."

"That we shall see!" Ailip answered, but his bride, Golden Hair, only smiled.

They went on, conversing like this, and Golden Hair kept urging him:

"We must get further away. Maybe we can get outside my father's power."

They walked on until at last Ailip was completely worn out.

"Let us rest a little," he said.

They sat down on the grass, but the moment they did so they were drawn into the ground. Golden Hair seized the scissors and cut off the tresses which Ailip had wound round his body. If she had not done this, he would have been drawn under. The tresses sank out of sight, but he remained on the surface.

His ribs were somewhat crushed and his bride was nowhere to be seen. She had vanished as though she had never been. He climbed out of the hole in the ground and said to himself: "What can this be? My bride has been stolen from my very arms and I don't know by whom! It's a shameful thing to have happened to me. I will not submit to it. I'll find her again—though it cost my life, I will."

And he set to digging up the earth at the place where the girl had been sitting. One day, two days he dug, but there was little sense in it. Ailip was strong, look you, but the only tools he had were his knife and his cap—and what could he do with them!

"I'll have to leave a mark to find the place, and go back and fetch a spade," he thought.

He was just making up his mind to do this when suddenly the fox —the one that had lured him into the forest—appeared. It stuck its little snout into the ground and rose up a withered old woman, and said:

"Ekh, Nimble-Wit! Nimble-Wit! Are you looking for gold or what?"

"I'm looking for my bride," he answered.

"Your bride's been back in the old place a long time. She's sitting on the stone there, weeping bitterly and dangling her hair in the water. And her hair's become twenty sazhens long. Not even you could lift it now."

"What can we do, little aunt?" Ailip asked her.

"You should have asked my advice before," she said. "First ask and learn: then set about your job. This is what you must do. Go home and live as you did before. If, after three years have passed,

you have not forgotten your bride, Golden Hair, I will come back and take you to her. If you try to find her by yourself, you'll never set eyes on her again."

Ailip had not been used to waiting like this. He liked to take what he wanted at once. But there was nothing for it: so he sorrowed for a while and then set off home again.

Goodness, how slowly those three years did pass! Spring came but he took no joy in it: he only wanted it to pass quickly. People could see that 'their Ailip' was upset about something: he was quite unlike his former self. His kinsfolk even asked him straight out:

"Are you ill?"

Ailip seized five of the sturdiest of them in one hand, lifted them up into the air and whirled them round, saying:

"If you ask me if I'm ill again, I'll throw the lot of you over that hill yonder."

He thought about Golden Hair all night and all day. He had to get a glimpse of her even if only from a distance—but he remembered the old woman's command and dared not disobey.

But one day, during the third year of his waiting, Ailip chanced to see another girl. Very young, with black hair, and she was chirpy as a tit. All she wanted was to hop about and frisk her tail. This girl diverted Ailip's thoughts. He said to himself:

"All the other men of my age have wives and families by now, whereas I—I find a bride and then let her slip out of my hands. It's a good thing nobody knows about it. A proper fool I'd look! Now, why shouldn't I marry this dark girl? That other one I can't be sure of having, but with this one all I have to do is pay her father and then she's mine. Her parents would be pleased for her to marry me—and unless I'm mistaken she wouldn't cry her heart out about it either."

So he reflected: then he remembered his bride Golden Hair, but no longer in the old way. It wasn't so much that he felt sorry that he had lost her as that he was angry about it. Snatched out of his arms, she'd been. How could he allow such a thing?

When the third year was up Ailip saw the fox. This time he didn't take aim at it with his bow, but followed where it led, only marking the way he went by breaking off a twig here, chipping a bit of rock there, and so on. They reached the same river and there was Golden Hair sitting on the stone just as before, except that now her tresses had grown twice as long. Ailip went up and greeted her:

"Good day to you, dearest little bride Golden Hair!"

"Good day to you, Ailip," she replied. "Do not be grieved that my tresses have grown so long. They are much lighter than they used to be. You must have thought about me a great deal for I could feel them getting lighter every day. It was only lately that something seemed to go wrong. 'Is he beginning to forget me,' I thought. But perhaps it was something quite different."

She smiled as she said this, as if she knew. Ailip felt ashamed to tell her at first, but after a bit he plucked up courage and confessed

the truth—that he had admired a dark-haired girl and had even thought of marrying her.

Golden Hair said:

"It is good that you have told me about this. I believe you. But come, let us go quickly. This time we will go so far that my father will not have any power over us."

So Ailip pulled her tresses out of the river and wound them round his body as before. He took the nanny-fox's scissors and they set off home through the forest. Ailip had marked the way so they went quite quickly. They walked on till nightfall and when it was quite dark Ailip said:

"Let us climb a tree. Maybe your father's power will not be able to draw us from the tree top."

"You may be right," said Golden Hair.

But how could the two of them climb a tree when they were tied together by Golden Hair's tresses as with a cord?

Golden Hair said: "My hair must be cut off. There's no point in dragging such a weight about with us. Let it come down to my ankles—that will be quite long enough."

But Ailip did not agree:

"No, your hair must stay as it is," he said, "it is so soft and fine and so silky to touch."

So Ailip unwound the tresses from his body. Golden Hair was the first to climb the tree but, being a woman, she wasn't used to it. Ailip helped her as best he could and somehow she managed to clamber up to the branches. Then Ailip quickly climbed up after her and lifted her tresses from the ground. They made a kind of nest among the thickest branches and prepared to spend the night up there.

"We'll stay here till daybreak," said Ailip and he tied Golden Hair's tresses to the branches so that she shouldn't fall down if she fell asleep. He tied them very carefully and said: "That won't come undone! Sleep now, my little bride, and I will keep watch. I will wake you at daybreak."

Golden Hair fell asleep almost at once and, truth to tell, Ailip himself dozed a bit. He felt so sleepy, look you, that he simply couldn't keep awake: he rubbed his eyes, shook his head, and turned this way and that; but it was no use. He got sleepier and sleepier and before long his head was nodding too. A brown owl kept flying round the tree and hooting Tu-whu! Tu-whu! as if warning him to be on guard. But Ailip took no notice; he slept and snored and dreamed. He dreamed he was walking towards his tent and his wife Golden Hair had come out to welcome him. Marvellously sweet and beautiful she was; her tresses were like a golden serpent and almost seemed to be alive. . . .

But just at midnight, the branches of the tree crackled and flared up! Ailip was scorched and flung to the ground. From out of the ground coiled a huge ring of fire and his bride Golden Hair turned into a cloud of little golden sparks. The sparks flew into the ring of fire

and were extinguished. Ailip rushed towards the spot, but there was nothing there. Darkness came down again, darkness so thick that he seemed to be blinded. He groped about all over the ground: nothing but grass and stones and leaf-mould. In one place, however, he found the ends of Golden Hair's tresses; two sazhens long and more they were. And this comforted him a little.

"This is a keepsake and a sign she's left me," he said to himself. "Maybe I can somehow manage it that her father has no power over her tresses."

As he thought this the fox suddenly popped up at his feet. It stuck its little snout into the ground and rose up a withered old woman and said:

"Ekh, Ailip! Nimble-Wit! Which is it you want: the tresses or your bride?"

"I want my bride," he told her, "with her golden tresses, twenty sazhens long."

"You're too late," said the old woman. "Her tresses have become thirty sazhens long now."

"That is no matter," said Ailip, "I only want my dear little bride."

"You should have said that before. Then listen to what I tell you: this is the last counsel I shall give you. Go back home and wait for another three years. I shall not come to fetch you again; you'll have to find the way yourself. Exactly three years from now you must go to her—not an hour earlier or later. And you must also pay your respects to Grandfather Owl and ask him to sharpen your wits for you a little."

Having said this, she disappeared. Ailip waited till it was light and then went home, thinking to himself:

"What owl did she mean, now? There are so many of them in the forest. Which one have I to pay my respects to?"

He pondered over this a long while and then he remembered that there had been a big brown owl flying about quite close to his head, when they were up in the tree. It had been hooting Tu-whu! Tu-whu! the whole time—just as if it was warning him to be no guard.

"It must have been that owl she meant," Ailip decided, and he went back to the place where Golden Hair had disappeared. He sat down and waited till nightfall and then called out:

"Grandfather Owl! Teach me to think and understand. Show me the way."

He called and called like this, but there was no answer. But Ailip had learned to be patient. He waited another day and tried again. There was no answer this time either, but Ailip waited yet a third day.

When evening came he had scarcely said the words "Grandfather Owl" when a voice from up in the tree replied:

"Tu-whu! Here I am! Who calls me?"

Ailip told the owl about the loss of his bride and asked him to help him win her back. The owl answered:

"Tu-whu! 'Twill be difficult, son, difficult!"

"No matter that it will be difficult," said Ailip. "I'll give all the strength and endurance I possess if only I can win back my bride."

"Tu-whu! Listen and I'll tell you what you must do." And the owl told him all he wanted to know. Poloz, the Great Snake, he said, possessed great power in these parts. You could ride on horseback for three whole days and still not get out of range of his power. There was only one place over which he hadn't any power and that was a rock in the middle of a certain lake. If anyone took some gold with them and went to this rock, a passage would open up in it, leading right down under the lake, and there the Great Snake could not seize you. And he described how they could find this lake—Lake Itkul it is. Finally the owl said:

"Tu-whu! Remember, my son, remember:—You can go there, but you can't get back again."

Ailip thanked Grandfather Owl and went back home. He soon found the lake with the rock in the middle, but said to himself:

"'Twould not be possible to get there in a single day. I'll have to build a road to it, to ride on."

So he set to work making a road. And a hard job it was, for him alone, to make a road through the thickest part of the forest, for a hundred versts and more. Sometimes he almost collapsed with fatigue. But he only had to take out the ends of her tresses which she had left him and gaze at them and stroke them and his strength would come back to him, and he'd be able to go on with the work. In this way three years flashed by, almost without his noticing it, and he only just managed to complete the road in time.

Then, punctually at the appointed hour, Ailip went to his bride. He pulled her tresses out of the river and wound them round his body and they ran off together through the forest. They ran as far as the road he'd made and there he had six horses waiting for them. He placed his bride on one horse, himself mounted another and held the other four by the bridle and they set off at a gallop. Whenever the horses they were riding grew tired they changed to another pair and then raced on again. And the fox ran on ahead of them. They galloped on and on till the horses were almost dead with fatigue and just managed to reach the edge of the lake by evening. Ailip took a canoe and quickly paddled his bride and the fox to the rock in the middle of the lake. When they reached it a passage opened in the rock and down it they went. And just as they did so, the sun set.

Goodness, what strange things happened then!

The moment the sun set Poloz, the Great Snake, encompassed the lake with three rings of fire. Little sparks of gold flew all over the lake. But he couldn't pull his daughter back again; the owl had outwitted him.

The owl perched itself on the rock in the lake and hooted three times:

"Tu-whu! Tu-whu! Tu-whu!"

As it did this the rings of fire grew dimmer as if they were dying down. And when they flared up again, the owl hooted once more.

Many nights Poloz, the Great Snake, went on trying, but it was no use: he had no power over the lake.

Ever since then gold has been found on the shores of the lake. Even in places where no trace of former rivers exist there is gold. It is found in little scales and small nuggets but never in big ones. How did that gold get there? Some say it was drawn from the tresses of Poloz's daughter. There was a lot of it there. And later on, even in my time, many's the quarrel there's been over it between the Bashkirs and the Kashinsky manufacturers.

As for Ailip and his bride, Golden Hair, they stayed under the lake. They have meadows and droves of horses and sheep—everything in plenty.

Sometimes, 'tis said, Golden Hair comes out on to the rock. Fellows have seen her there. At daybreak she appears, they say. She sits on the rock and lets her golden hair wind round it, just like a golden serpent. Beautiful it is. . . . Oh how beautiful!

No, I've never seen her myself. Not even once. I won't lie to you.

SINYUSHKA'S WELL

THERE WAS ONCE A YOUNG FELLOW AT OUR WORKS NAMED ILYA. ALL alone in the world he was—he'd buried every relative he had. But from each of them he'd inherited something.

From his father he'd inherited his strong shoulders and arms; from his mother her teeth and her tongue; from his grandfather Ignat a pick and a spade; and from his grandmother Lukerya a special keepsake. It's about this keepsake I must tell you first.

This grandmother, look you, was a clever old thing. She went about picking up feathers in the streets, meaning to make him a pillow out of them. But she didn't live long enough to finish it. When she was on her death-bed grandmother Lukerya called her grandson to her side and said to him:

"Look, Ilyushenka darling, what a lot of feathers your old granny has collected. Almost a whole sieve-full! And what feathers indeed! All small and of a size and brightly coloured; a treat to look at they are. Take them as a keepsake to remember me by. They may come in useful. When you come to take a bride and your bride brings you a pillow, you won't have to hang your head. 'That's nothing new to me,' you'll be able to say. 'I've got my own feathers which my grandmother left me.' Only don't go hunting after pillows, look you. If she brings one, so much the better: but if she doesn't, don't fret. Be cheerful and work well and even on straw you'll sleep soundly

and have sweet dreams. So long as you harbour no evil thoughts, all will go well, life will flow smoothly for you. The white day will gladden you, the dark night will caress you, and the red sun will bring you joy. But harbour evil thoughts and nothing will be right and you might as well beat your head against a wall."

"What evil thoughts are you speaking of, grandmother?" Ilya asked her.

"Thoughts about riches and wealth," she said. "They're worse than anything. Men get nothing from them but sorrow and care. 'Twas not to bring you riches I worked so hard to make you a pillow."

"Then how about the riches of the earth?" asked Ilya. "Do you really count them for nothing? Why, there have been. . . ."

"There have been many things. But riches are things you can't depend on. They come in lumps and depart in dust and bring men nothing but sorrow. Do not think about them; do not worry yourself about them. Of all the riches of the earth there's only one kind, 'tis said, that's clean and sure, and that's only when grandmother Sinyushka turns into a beautiful maiden and bestows them with her own pretty hands. Sinyushka will only bestow them on a man who is clever and bold and simple of heart. To no one else will she give them. Remember what I say, Ilyushenka darling, these are my last words to you."

So Ilya bowed to his grandmother and said:

"I thank you, Grandmother Lukerya, for the feathers you've given me; and still more do I thank you for your counsel. I will never forget what you said."

Soon afterwards the old woman died and Ilya was left all alone in the world, being all the sons and daughters of his father. Naturally the old women who laid out the dead came hurrying to the cottage to wash and dress the corpse and prepare it for the grave. Now these old women didn't run after corpses because their own lives were all that easy, and what with begging for this and helping themselves to that, in one way and another they soon walked off with all his grandmother's belongings. When Ilya came back from the graveyard the house was bare as bare could be. All he had left were the clothes he stood up in, his peasant-coat and his cap. Someone had even laid covetous hands on the feathers and taken them from the sieve where his grandmother had kept them. Just three feathers remained, caught in the mesh of the sieve, one white, one black and one red.

Ilya was vexed that he had not taken better care of his grandmother's keepsake.

"I must put these three feathers to some use," he thought. "'Twould only be seemly. Granny toiled so hard for my sake, and now it looks as if it meant nothing to me."

So he picked up a bit of blue thread that was lying on the floor, tied the feathers tightly together and fastened them to his cap.

"That's just the place for them," he thought. "Whenever I put on my cap or take it off, I shall think of Granny's bequest. 'Twould

be of service to me in life, she said, and I must always remember it."

Then he put on his cap and his coat and set off for the prospecting fields. He didn't even trouble to lock the door of the cottage because it was utterly empty. The only thing there was the empty sieve and no one would trouble to pick that up even by the roadside.

Ilya was a grown-up fellow and long of an age to have married. Six or seven years he'd been working as a prospector. In the days of serfdom even small children would be driven off to work. Before marriage ten years of hard toil would have been put in for the master. And this Ilya had grown up on the prospecting field, as you might say. He knew the place inside out. It was no little distance to the prospecting field.

'Twas at Gremikha they were finding gold at that time, almost up against White Hill. So Ilya thought to himself:

"I'll go through Zyuzelsky Marsh. This hot weather we're having will have dried the marsh up and I'll be able to get across it. I can save three versts by going that way, or even four."

No sooner said than done. He went straight through the forest, the way they walked to and from the prospecting fields in autumn. At first he walked quite quickly, but after a while he grew tired and lost his way. Walking over hillocks isn't as simple as going along a road: you want to go one way and the lie of the land leads you another. And he tramped on and on till the sweat was pouring from him. All of a sudden he came upon a sort of valley or dell. There was a hollow in the middle of it where grass grew, peach-wort and meadow-grass: and all round there were steep banks with pine-trees growing on them. Quite a dry place it looked. The only trouble was that Ilya didn't know which way to go. Though he'd often been that way he'd never seen a dell like this before.

Ilya walked through the middle of the dell, in-between the banks. He walked on and in the middle of the dell was a round well full of what looked like spring water, but you couldn't see the bottom. The water was clear enough but across its surface stretched a blue web and in the middle of it sat a spider, also blue.

Ilya was overjoyed at the sight of the water. He swept away the web and bent down to drink. But when he did a kind of dizziness came over him. He almost fell into the water and he felt a great longing to sleep.

"Fancy the marsh making me so tired!" he thought. "I'd better lie down and sleep for a bit."

He tried to stand up, but found he couldn't. However he managed to crawl two sazhens or so to the bank and there he put his cap under his head and stretched himself out to sleep. But all at once he saw an old woman rise up out of the well. She was not more than three chetverts* in height, wore a blue dress and had a blue shawl round her head; and she herself was of the same blue all over, and so thin

* Eight inches.

that a breath of wind would have blown her away. But her eyes, which were also blue, were young eyes, and so large they didn't seem to belong to her.

The old woman stared at the young man and stretched her arms out towards him; and these arms of hers grew and grew till they almost reached his head. They were not solid, these arms of hers, look you, but like vapour, and blue as mist. There was no strength in them and there were no nails on the fingers, yet they were frightening to look upon. Ilya tried to move away from them, but his strength was gone.

"I won't look at them," he thought, "'Twill be less frightening at any rate."

So he turned his head away; and in so doing his nose brushed against the feathers. This set him sneezing. He sneezed and sneezed till his nose ran blood and still he couldn't stop. But at the same time his head felt better. So he picked up his cap and jumped to his feet. He looked towards the well and there stood the old woman fairly quivering with rage. Her arms stretched to his feet but she couldn't raise them from the ground. Ilya could see that something was wrong with the old woman—her powers seemed to have left her. He stopped sneezing, blew his nose, and said to her with a sneer:

"What's the matter, old woman? Bitten off more than you can chew, eh?"

And he spat at her arms and went on his way. But the old woman called after him in a youthful, ringing voice:

"You wait! Don't crow so much! Next time you come I'll have your head!"

"But I shan't come again," Ilya said.

"Oho, you're afraid! You wouldn't dare!" the old woman said triumphantly.

This piqued Ilya, so he stopped and said:

"Well, if that's what you think, I will come back—and next time I'll draw some water from your well."

The old woman burst out laughing at this and went on taunting Ilya:

"You're just an idle boaster, a braggart. It's only thanks to your grandmother Lukerya that you've escaped and yet you give yourself airs! The man's not born that can draw water from this well."

"We shall see whether he's born or not," replied Ilya.

The old woman went on:

"Just a babbler—that's all you are! As if you could draw water when you daren't even go near it! It's just empty boasts you're making. Perhaps you'll bring some other men with more courage than you have!"

"You won't catch me bringing anyone else to you," said Ilya. "I've heard too much of your evil ways and how you deceive people."

The old woman repeated:

"You won't come back! You won't! As if a miserable creature like you would dare!"

So then Ilya said:

"All right. I will come back. When there's a good wind blowing on a Sunday, be ready to receive a guest!"

"What do you want a wind for?" the old woman asked.

"That you'll see when I come," said Ilya. "But mind you wipe that spittle from your arms—don't forget to do that!"

"What difference does it make what kind of arm I pull you to the bottom with?" the old woman screeched. "Clever though you are, you shan't escape me all the same. 'Twill be no use relying on the wind or your granny's feathers. They won't help you."

Well, they railed at each other like this for a while, and then Ilya set off again, marking the way as he went and thinking:

"So that's what she's like, Sinyushka! She scarcely seems to be alive, yet has the fateful eyes and ringing voice of a maid. I would like to see her turn into a beautiful wench."

Ilya had heard a great deal about Sinyushka. The prospectors often talked of her. They told how men followed her into lonely marshes and down old mine shafts, and how wherever she sat treasure was to be found. Remove Sinyushka from the place she sat on and you would find a well full of gold and precious stones. And you could take away as much as you liked. Many a man 'twas said, had gone out in search of this hiding place of hers, but they'd all either come back empty-handed or perished.

It was nearly evening when Ilya reached the prospecting fields. Naturally the overseer scolded him:

"Why have you been so long?" he asked.

Ilya explained: there'd been this and that and he'd been burying his grandmother. The overseer felt a bit ashamed, but for all that he found something to grumble at.

"What are those feathers in your cap? What were they put there to celebrate?"

"They're a legacy from my grandmother," replied Ilya. "I've put them on my cap to remember her by."

The overseer and some other men who happened to be close by laughed heartily at the idea of such a legacy, but Ilya said:

"Yes, and it may be I wouldn't exchange these feathers of mine for all the master's goldfield. Because they're not ordinary feathers—they're enchanted. This white one is for a happy day, the black one is for a peaceful night, and the red one for a beautiful sun."

He said this in jest, of course. Now there was another young fellow there—Kuska Doublesnout they called him. He was the same age as Ilya, they'd been born in the same month, but he was different from Ilya in every respect. He, this Kuzka, came of a quite well-to-do family. Truth to tell there was no need for him to go near the goldfield—he could have found better work to do at home. For all that Kuzka used to hang around the goldfield with the idea

that if he came across something good he could always manage to make away with it. And, indeed, in the art of transferring other people's findings to his own pocket, Doublesnout was a master. A fellow would have scarcely so much as glimpsed a bit of gold and Doublesnout would grab it, and you'd see no more of it. In a word, he was a thief. And he had a mark to show his calling, too. One of the prospectors had struck at him with a spade, look you. The spade had only gashed him, but it had left its mark all right, splitting his lips and nose in half. 'Twas on account of this scar that he was nicknamed Doublesnout.

This Kuska was mighty envious of Ilya. Ilya, look you, was a strong, vigorous, cheerful fellow, and his work always went well. And when he'd finished the day's work and eaten his supper he used to indulge in a sing-song and sometimes join in a dance—prospectors, look you, are given to this kind of thing. So how could Kuska, who had neither strength nor courage and was a fool into the bargain, compare with such a man. But Kuzka had his own explanation of the matter:

"There's no doubt about it," he said to himself, "Ilya has some magic charm. That's why he's so successful and never gets tired at his work."

So when he heard about the feathers, Kuzka thought: "So that's what his charm is!"

And that very night he stole the feathers.

The next morning Ilya looked for the feathers. "Where are they?" he wondered. "I must have dropped them," and he went out to look for them in the prospecting field.

The other men laughed at him:

"Have you lost your wits, boy? Looking for tiny feathers after all the feet that have been here. They have been trampled into the mud by now. And what good are they to you anyway?"

"What good!" Ilya exclaimed. "But they're my grandmother's keepsake."

"Keepsakes should be kept in safe places," they told him, "or in the owner's head, not carried about on a cap."

Ilya reflected that what they said was the truth, so he gave up searching for the feathers. It never entered his head that a thief might have taken them.

Kuzka watched carefully to see how Ilya would get on without his grandmother's feathers. One day he saw Ilya take a prospecting scoop and go into the forest, and he followed him, thinking he'd probably got some washings hidden there somewhere. But no washings came to light. Ilya fastened the scoop to a pole, four sazhens or so in length, and so it couldn't be washings he was after. What could he be up to? After this Kuzka watched him more carefully than ever.

It was getting on for autumn now and a strong wind was blowing. One Saturday when the other prospectors were setting off home from

the gold-field, Ilya asked permission to go too. At first the overseer wouldn't let him. "You've only just been," he said, "and besides what do you want to go for? You've no family and all you possessed — those precious feathers—you lost on the gold-field." But in the end he let him go. And Kuzka saw his chance. He slipped off to the place where Ilya's scoop and pole were hidden. A long time he had to wait there, but thieves are renowned for their patience. Don't we say: "A thief will outstay the watchdog, let alone the master." And in the morning along came Ilya and picked up his scoop, saying:

"I haven't any feathers now, worse luck. But there's a good wind blowing. If it whistles like this now, there'll be a regular gale by noon."

And in truth there was such a wind the forest fairly groaned with it. Ilya followed the marks he'd left to find the way and Double-snout crept after him gloating:

"So that's what they do, those feathers of his. They guide him to riches!"

It took Ilya a long while to find his way by the marks and the wind was gradually dying down. By the time he reached the dell it was so still that not a leaf stirred. Ilya looked towards the well and there was the old woman calling out in a ringing voice:

"So the fighter has come! He's lost his grandmother's feathers and been a good judge of the wind! Well, what are you going to do now? Run home and wait for the wind to blow? Maybe if you wait long enough, it will!"

She was standing a little way away from the well, and this time she didn't stretch her arms out towards him. But there was a thick mist hanging over the well, like a blue cap.

Ilya ran down the hill and thrust the scoop on the pole straight into the blue mist, calling out: "Mind I don't hurt you by mistake, you old wretch."

He began drawing the scoop up again, but it was very heavy. It was all he could do to lift it. The old woman laughed at him, showing her young teeth.

"I'm waiting to see how you'll get the scoop over to where you stand. 'Twon't be much of my water you'll be drinking!"

She was teasing the boy, look you. Ilya saw that she was right; the scoop certainly was too heavy. And he flew into a rage.

"Drink it yourself!" he shouted. And summoning up all his strength, he lifted the scoop a little and tried to tip it over the old woman. She stepped back. Ilya followed her. She moved still further away. At that moment the pole snapped in two and the water spilled over the ground.

The old woman laughed more than ever:

"You should fix the scoop to a stout log—'twould be stronger that way."

Ilya threatened her:

"Just you wait, you old wretch. I'll give you a sousing yet!"

Thereupon the old woman said:

"Very well then. Enough of compliments. I can see you're a bold clever fellow. Come back one night when there's a moon. I'll show you all kinds of treasure and you can take away as much as you can carry. If I'm not up here, just say the words: 'I've come without a scoop,' and everything shall be yours."

"But what I want," Ilya replied, "is to see you change into a beautiful maiden."

"That depends on what you do," the old woman laughed and again she showed her young teeth.

Doublesnout had been watching all this and listening to every word.

"I must go straight back and fetch some wallets," he said to himself. "If only Ilya doesn't get here before me!"

And off he went.

Ilya, meanwhile, made his way home. He went over the hillocks and across the marshes and came to his cottage, and there a surprise awaited him: his grandmother's sieve was no longer there.

Ilya was astonished—who could have taken such a thing? He looked up his friends at the Works and chatted with one and then another for a while and then went back to the gold-field, not crossing the marsh this time but following the proper road.

Five days passed and Ilya couldn't get what had happened out of his head. He kept thinking about it when at work and he couldn't sleep because of it. Try as he would to shut them out, he kept seeing those dark blue eyes and hearing that ringing voice saying:

"Come back one night when there's a moon."

So he decided:

"I'll go, if only to see what kind of treasure there is. And who knows? Maybe she'll show herself to me as a beautiful maiden."

A new moon was due and the nights were growing less dark. All of a sudden a rumour went round the goldfield that Doublesnout had disappeared. They ran round to the Works, but he wasn't there; and the overseer had the forest searched, but they couldn't find him there either. Truth to tell, the searchers didn't exert themselves overmuch for they all thought: "It's no loss to anyone if a thief disappears." And there the matter ended.

At full moon Ilya set out, and made his way to the appointed place. He looked towards the well and there was no one there. Even so he was careful to stay on the slope, as he said softly:

"I've come without a scoop."

He had no sooner spoken these words than the old woman appeared and said kindly:

"Welcome, dear guest! Long have I waited for you! Come and take whatever you can carry away."

So saying, she seemed to lift a lid from the well, revealing all kinds of treasure. Full to the brim, it was. Ilya longed to go up and look

at the treasure but he didn't leave the slope. The old woman urged him to come down:

"Well, what are you waiting for? Come, I say, and fill up your wallet."

"I have no wallet," replied Ilya. "And Grandmother Lukerya told me that the only riches that are clean and sure are those that you give with your own hands."

"Goodness, what a finicky fellow you are! Wants it brought to him, does he? Very well, have it your own way!"

As the old woman said this, a blue pillar rose up out of the well. And out of this pillar stepped a beautiful maiden, all dressed up like a queen. She was nearly half as tall as a tall pine tree, and in her hands she bore a golden tray heaped with all sorts of treasure; there was gold dust and precious stones and nuggets that were nearly as big as loaves. The maiden came up to Ilya and, bowing, offered him the tray.

Ilya had grown up on the goldfields and had worked in the weighing room and knew what gold weighed. He looked at the tray and said to the old woman:

"You're trying to fool me. No man on earth could hold up a weight like that."

"You won't take it?" asked the old woman.

"Certainly not," said Ilya.

"Very well, have it your own way! I'll give you another present instead," said the old woman.

No sooner had she said this than the girl with the golden tray vanished and again a blue pillar rose up out of the well. Another girl emerged from it. She was shorter than the first and beautiful like her, but dressed like a merchant's daughter. This girl held a silver tray in her hands and this too was laden with treasure. But Ilya would not take this tray either. He said to the old woman:

"A man cannot lift that much; and 'tis not with your own hands you are giving it."

At this the old woman burst out laughing, really like a girl.

"Very well, have it your own way," she said. "This time I'll please the pair of us. But mind you're not sorry afterwards. Now, wait!"

No sooner had she said this than both she and the girl with the silver tray vanished. Ilya waited and waited but nobody came. He was getting quite tired of waiting when suddenly the grass rustled behind him. He looked round and saw a girl coming towards him. Quite an ordinary girl, of normal human height. About eighteen years old, she looked. She was wearing a little blue dress, she had a blue kerchief on her head and on her feet were a pair of slippers, also blue. And she was more beautiful than words can say. Eyes like stars, arched eyebrows, lips like raspberries and a plait of flaxen-coloured hair with a blue ribbon entwined in it flung across her shoulders.

The girl walked up to Ilya and said:

"Accept this present, dear friend Ilyushenka. With all my heart I give it."

And with her own white hands she handed him Grandmother Lukerya's old sieve filled with berries. There were strawberries and raspberries and yellow cloudberries and black currants and bilberries. Every kind of berry you could wish for. The sieve was brimming over with them. And on top were the three feathers, one white, one black and one red, bound together by the piece of blue thread.

Ilya took the sieve and stood there like a fool: he just couldn't understand where this girl had come from and how she had managed to pick all these different berries at that time of the year. At last he found his tongue and asked her:

"Where do you come from, fair maiden? Tell me your name."

The girl laughed and said:

"People call me Grandmother Sinyushka. But to him who is bold and clever and simple of heart I appear as you see me now. But that happens but seldom."

So then Ilya realised who it was he was speaking to, and he asked her:

"But where did you get these feathers from?"

"'Twas this way," she said. "Doublesnout came here to steal my riches. He fell into the well with his wallets and was drowned; but the feathers floated on top. I can see you're a simple-hearted fellow right enough."

Ilya didn't know what else to say, and the girl became silent too and fingered the ribbon in her plait. Then she said:

"So there you are, dear friend Ilyushenka. I am Sinyushka. Ever old and ever young. Eternally watching over the riches here." She was silent for a while and then she asked him:

"Well, have you finished staring at me? You'd better stop or you'll always be seeing me in your dreams."

And she gave a sigh which pierced the young man like a knife. He would have given anything to have her turn into a real living girl; but in the same instant she vanished.

Ilya stood there for a long, long time. Only when the blue mist from the well spread out and covered the whole dell did he turn for home. It was already daylight when he reached his cottage. He opened the door and as he did so the sieve with the berries became very heavy, the bottom fell out and nuggets and precious stones scattered all over the floor.

Thanks to these riches Ilya was able to buy his release from his master at once. He became a free man, and bought himself a nice house; he kept a horse, but he couldn't bring himself to marry. He could not get that girl out of his head. He could neither sleep nor rest because of her. And Grandmother Lukerya's feathers were of no help to him. Many a time he said to himself:

"Ah, Grandmother Lukerya! Grandmother Lukerya! You taught

me how to gain Sinyushka's riches—why didn't you teach me how to banish sorrow? You didn't know yourself, 'twould seem."

He pined so much that at last he made up his mind:

"'Twould be better to drown in Sinyushka's well than to go on enduring this anguish."

So he set off for Zyuzelsky marsh, still taking his grandmother's feathers with him.

It was the berry-picking season and people were out picking strawberries. Just as Ilya entered the forest he met a bunch of some ten girls carrying full baskets. One girl, walking apart from the others, caught his eye. About eighteen years old she might be. She wore a blue frock and a blue kerchief on her head, and she was more beautiful than words can tell. Arched brows, eyes like stars, lips like raspberries, a plait of flaxen-coloured hair entwined with a blue ribbon flung across her shoulder. The very image of the other one, she was. There was one little difference; the other had worn blue slippers and this girl was bare-footed.

Ilya stood there as if rooted to the ground. He stared at the girl and she gave him look for look with her blue eyes and laughed, showing her teeth. Ilya recovered himself a little and said:

"How is it that I've never seen you before?"

"Well, stare away, if you want to," she answered. "I'm not greedy: I won't charge you for it!"

"Where do you live?" he asked her.

"Walk straight ahead, then turn to your right, and you'll see a big tree stump. Give your noddle a good bang against it and then when the sparks fly out of your eyes you'll be able to see me properly."

She was teasing him, of course, in the way young girls do. But afterwards she told him who she was, what street she lived in and her name; all as it should be. And her eyes drew him to her like a magnet.

In this young girl Ilya had met his fate. But they were not together for long. She came from Mramor, look you, the marble quarries. That was why Ilya hadn't seen her before. Well, everyone knows how it is with the folks there. Their girls are the handsomest you'll find in these parts, but marry one of them and you'll soon be a widower. They work on the stone from an early age and fall into a consumption.

Ilya didn't live long either. He'd inhaled enough sickness from this one and the other one too.

And soon they discovered a big goldfield at Zyuzelka. Ilya hadn't made any secret of where he'd obtained his riches, look you; so they started digging up the land at Zyuzelka and before long they struck a rich vein of gold.

Even I can remember good hauls being made there. What a lot of gold they raised. But the well itself, that they never found. The blue mist, however, still hangs over places, showing where the riches are buried.

All we did was just to scratch the surface, but you have to dig deep down. . . . Sinyushka's well lies deep, very deep down, they say. It still awaits prospectors to find it.

SILVER HOOF

THERE WAS ONCE AN OLD MAN LIVED AT OUR MINE CALLED KOKOVANYA. His own wife and children had died, so he hit on the idea of adopting an orphan. He asked the neighbours if they knew of any and they told him:

"There are the orphaned children of Grigory Potopayev of Glinka, who's just died. The two elder girls were sent by the Manager to the Master's sewing room, but there's a little girl of six whom nobody wants. Why don't you take her?"

"I wouldn't know what to be doing with a girl. A boy, now, that would be better. I could teach him my job, and when he grew up he could help me. But what could I do with a girl? What could I teach her?"

But he thought it over a while and then said:

"I used to know Grigory, yes, and his wife too. Cheerful, hard-working people they were. If the girl takes after her parents, she'd be a cheerful soul to have in the house. I'll take her. But will she be willing to come?"

The neighbours told him: "She gets a bad time of it where she is now. The Manager put a poor fellow in her father's cottage and told him to look after the child till she grew up. He's got more than ten in his own family and they haven't enough to eat themselves, so his wife takes it out of the little orphan and grudges her every bite she eats. And the child, tiny though she is, understands and feels ashamed. She'll be only too glad to get away. Anyway, you'll be able to persuade her."

"To be sure," said Kokovanya, "I'll persuade her somehow."

So one holiday, he went to see the family the orphan was living with. The cottage was packed full of people, both grown-ups and children. The little girl was sitting on a trap-door beside the stove and there was a brown cat sitting beside her. The little girl was very small and the cat was very small too, and so thin and so bedraggled, it was a wonder it had been allowed indoors. The little girl was stroking the cat and the cat was purring, purring so loudly you could hear it all over the house.

Kokovanya looked at the little girl and asked:

"So that's Grigory's podaryonka*?"

The wife answered:

"Herself. It's bad enough to have to look after her, but she must

* Podaryonka means 'little gift.'

always be bringing in that bedraggled cat with her too. We can't drive it away. It's scratched all my children, yet we have to feed it."

"Your children must be unkind to it," Kokovanya said, "it's purring with her right enough."

Then he turned to the little orphan and said:

"Well, Darionushka*, would you like to come and live with me?"

"How did you know my name was Darionka, Grandpa?"

"I don't know. The name just came to my lips of itself."

"Who are you?" asked the little girl.

"I'm a sort of hunter. In summer-time I prospect for gold and in winter-time I go out into the forest and hunt for a wild goat that I've never managed to set eyes on yet."

"Do you want to shoot it?"

"No. I shoot ordinary goats, but not this one," Kokovanya told her. "What I want to do is to find out the place where it stamps with its right forefoot."

"Why do you want to do that?"

"Well, when you come and live with me I'll tell you all about it," he said.

The little girl was curious to hear more about this mysterious goat and she could see that the old man was cheerful and kind. So she said:

"All right, I'll come. But you must let my cat, Murionka, come too. See what a fine cat she is!"

"But of course," Kokovanya said. "No one with his wits about him would leave such a musical cat as that behind. 'Twill be as good as a balalaika in our house."

The wife meanwhile was listening to all they said. When she heard Kokovanya invite the little orphan to go and live with him she was overjoyed and started putting Darionka's things together as fast as ever she could. She was only afraid the old man might change his mind.

The little cat also seemed to understand what they were saying, for she rubbed herself against their legs and purred:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

So off they went to live in Kokovanya's cottage.

He was very tall and had a long beard and she was a tiny little girl, with a little round nose like a button. They walked down the road with the little bedraggled cat scampering after them.

So these three set up house together: Grandpa Kokovanya, little Darionka the Orphan, and Murionka the Cat. The days went by; they didn't grow rich, but they didn't grumble at life and each had plenty to do. Kokovanya went off to work first thing in the morning; Darionka looked after the house and cooked their soup and kasha;

* The Russian Christian name Daria is equivalent to our Christian name Dorothy and has the same meaning: "Gift of God." By calling her Darionushka, Kokovanya inadvertently used one of the diminutives of her real name, Daria.

and Murionka went mouse-hunting. And in the evenings all three were happy together.

The old man was a wonderful story-teller. Darionka loved listening to his stories and Murionka, the Cat, used to sit and purr:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

But after every story, Darionka would remind him:

"Tell me about that goat, Grandpa. What is it like?"

At first Kokovanya kept putting her off the subject, but in the end he said:

"Well, it's a special kind of goat. It's got a silver hoof on its right forefoot. And wherever it stamps with this hoof precious stones appear. If it stamps once there'll be one stone; if it stamps twice there'll be two stones; and if it stamps many times there'll be a whole heap of them."

Afterwards he was sorry he'd told her this, for from that night she could talk of nothing but this goat.

"Grandpa, is it a big goat?"

He told her it was about as tall as the table, had very thin legs and a small head.

Then she asked:

"Grandpa, has the goat got horns?"

"Its horns," he answered, "are very peculiar horns. The horns of ordinary goats have only two branches, but this goat's horns have five."

"Grandpa, whom does the goat eat?"

"It doesn't eat anyone," he told her. "It feeds on grass and leaves. And in winter-time it sometimes takes a nibble at the hay in the haystacks."

"Grandpa, what kind of hair has the goat got?"

"In summer it's brown, like our Murionka's here, and in winter it's grey."

"Grandpa, does the goat smell nasty?"

Kokovanya got quite angry at this question:

"Of course it doesn't smell nasty. It's only domestic goats do that. Forest goats smell of the forest."

When autumn came Kokovanya got ready to go into the forest. He had to go there to see where the goats were grazing most. Darionka begged him to let her come too.

"Please take me with you, Grandpa! I might catch a glimpse of that goat."

But Kokovanya told her:

"You wouldn't be able to recognize him at a distance. All goats have horns in autumn and you wouldn't be able to see how many branches they had on them. But in winter—that's different. The ordinary goats lose their horns then, but this one, Silver Hoof, he keeps his all the year round. In winter time—that's when you could recognize him at a distance, but not now."

And there the conversation ended. Darionka stayed at home and

Kokovanya set off for the forest. He came back in five days and told her:

"A lot of the goats are grazing on the Poldneevsky side. That's where I shall go this winter."

"But how will you sleep in the forest in winter-time?" Darionka asked him.

"I've got a little shed up by the grazing fields," he said. "It's a good shed and has a fireplace and a window, and it's nice and warm there even in winter."

Darionka asked him again:

"Will Silver Hoof be grazing there?"

"Who knows! Maybe he will."

The little girl begged and begged him:

"Please take me with you, Grandpa. I promise I'll stay inside the shed. And maybe Silver Hoof will come up close and I'll see him."

At first the old man wouldn't hear of it:

"How can you ask such a thing?" he said. "How could I possibly take a little girl up in the forest with me, and in winter too? You'd have to go on skis, and you don't know how to ski, and you'd be buried in the snow. And besides you'd freeze!"

But Darionka wouldn't let him alone:

"Please take me with you, Grandpa! I can ski a little."

Kokovanya held firm for a long time, but at last he said to himself:

"I shall have to take her. Once she's been, she won't want to come again."

So he said:

"All right, you can come. But mind you don't cry and don't ask to be taken home before it's time."

When the winter was at its height they got ready to go. Kokovanya packed two sacks of rusks and his hunting gear and the other things he wanted on a hand sledge. And Darionka made a little bundle of her belongings, too. She took some scraps of stuff with her to make clothes for her doll, and a ball of thread and a needle, and a piece of rope.

"Who knows?" she thought to herself. "With this rope I might be able to catch Silver Hoof."

Darionka was sorry to leave her cat behind, but it couldn't be helped. When they were leaving she stroked her and said:

"Grandpa and I are going to the forest, Murionka, but you must stay here and catch the mice for us. When we've seen Silver Hoof, we'll come back, and I'll tell you about it."

Murionka looked at her mischievously, purring the while:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

Off Kokovanya and Darionka went. All the neighbours were astonished to see them go:

"The old man must have lost his wits! Taking a little girl like that into the forest in winter-time!"

As they came out of the Works grounds they heard a great commo-

tion among the dogs. Such a barking and roaring they set up, you'd have thought they'd seen a wolf in the street. They looked round and there was Murionka defending herself against a whole pack of dogs. Murionka during this time had much improved, look you. She had grown big and strong. The dogs were afraid to come near her.

Darionka wanted to pick up the cat and take her home, but how could she? In a flash Murionka was off into the forest and up a pine-tree. And just try and catch her there!

Darionka called and called to her to come down, but it was no use. So they went on. But after a while they looked back and there was Murionka following stealthily after them. And thus they came to the shed in the forest.

So there were three of them in the shed. Darionka said:

"'Twill be more cheerful with three of us."

And the old man agreed:

"True: 'twill be more cheerful."

And Murionka curled up in a ball beside the stove and purred noisily:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

The goats were very plentiful that winter—ordinary ones, that is. Not a day went by but Kokovanya killed one or two and brought their carcasses back to the shed. Soon the hides piled up and he had salted more goat meat than his hand-sledge could carry. He would have to go back to the factory settlement and get a horse; but how could he leave Darionka with a cat alone in the forest? But Darionka had got used to the forest and she herself said to the old man:

"Why don't you go back and get a horse, Grandpa? We shall have to have one to take the goat meat back."

Kokovanya was quite astonished to hear her say this:

"Why, what a smart child you are, Daria Grigoriyevna! Thought it out just like a grown-up! I had wanted to go, but was afraid to leave you alone."

"What is there to be frightened of?" the little girl said. "You've told me yourself the shed is strong and the wolves couldn't get in. Besides, there aren't any wolves in this part. And I'll have Murionka with me—I shan't be frightened. But hurry back all the same!"

So Kokovanya went away and Darionka and Murionka were left in the forest. Daria was used to being alone in the day-time when Kokovanya was out hunting, but when night fell she did feel a little frightened. But she glanced at Murionka purring happily, and cheered up again. She sat down by the window and looked out at the grazing fields, and there, rolling through the forest, came a little ball of snow. As it came nearer she could see it was a goat running. Its legs were very thin, its head small, and on each of its horns were five branches. Darionka rushed out of the shed to look at it, but it was gone. She waited awhile and then went back to the shed, thinking:

"I must have fallen asleep and seen it in a dream."

Murionka purred:

"Perr-fectly right. Perr-fectly right!"

And Darionka lay down beside the cat and didn't wake up till morning.

The next day passed but Kokovanya didn't return. Darionka felt terribly lonely, but she didn't cry. She stroked Murionka and said:

"Don't be sad, Murionushka! Grandpa's sure to come back to-morrow!"

And Murionka sang her little song:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

Darionka again sat down by the little window and gazed up at the beauty of the stars. She was just about to go to bed when she heard a tapping on the wall outside. Darionka was scared; the tapping was repeated on the opposite wall; then on the wall where the window was; then on the one where the door was; and then it sounded on the roof itself. They were not loud taps but gentle ones, as though someone were running lightly.

Darionka thought:

"I wonder if it's the goat I saw yesterday?" And she was so eager to see if it was, that she forgot her fear and opened the door and went out. And there was the goat, quite near, standing quite calmly. It raised its right forefoot and stamped. On its forefoot a silver hoof flashed and on its horns were five branches.

Darionka did not know what to do. She started calling to the goat as one would to a domestic one:

"Me—eh! Me—eh!"

The goat seemed to laugh at this. Then it turned and ran back to the grazing fields.

Darionka went back to the shed and told Murionka what had happened:

"I've seen Silver Hoof! I've seen his horns and his hoof as well. The only thing I didn't see was the place where he stamps and shows you where the stones are. But he'll show me next time."

And Murionka, look you, just went on purring her little song:

"Perr-fectly right! Perr-fectly right!"

The third day passed and still Kokovanya didn't return. Darionka felt so lonely and sad she could hardly restrain her tears. She wanted to talk to Murionka, but when she looked round she was not there. At this Darionka got a terrible fright. She rushed out of the shed to try and find her.

It was a bright moonlit night and you could see a long way off. Darionka looked round and there, quite close, was the cat, sitting in the grazing field, and facing her was the goat. There it stood with its forefoot raised and on it flashed a silver hoof.

Murionka was shaking her head and the goat was doing the same—'twas just as if they were talking to each other. Then they started running up and down the fields. The goat ran and ran and then

stopped and stamped its hoof. Murionka ran up to it and the goat darted off and again stamped its foot. For a long time they scampered round the grazing fields like this, and then they ran out of sight. But suddenly they reappeared again by the shed itself.

The goat leapt on to the roof of the shed and started stamping with its silver hoof. And raining from the hoof like a shower of sparks were precious stones, red and blue and green and turquoise . . . of every colour they were.

As it happened Kokovanya returned at that very moment. He could not recognize his own shed when he saw it. It was a great heap of precious stones, sparkling and glittering with a thousand different lights. And up on top of it stood the goat, stamping away with its silver hoof, and the precious stones streaming from it.

Suddenly Murionka jumped up on to the roof too. She stood beside the goat and gave a loud Miau! and the next moment both she and Silver Hoof vanished.

In an instant Kokovanya half-filled his cap with the precious stones, but Darionka begged him:

"Don't touch them, Grandpa! To-morrow we'll be able to see them in daylight."

Kokovanya followed her counsel. But the next morning there was a heavy fall of snow, and when they went out there were no stones to be seen. They dug away the snow, but they could not find any stones at all. Still, even the few Kokovanya had scraped into his cap were enough for them.

Only one regret did they have: they never saw Murionka again. And Silver Hoof they never set eyes on again either. He'd helped them once and that was enough. . . .

But afterwards many precious stones were found on the grazing fields where they'd seen the goat. Big green ones, they were, chrysolites they call them. You've seen some, I expect.

THE KEY-STONE

LOOKING FOR PRECIOUS STONES NOW, THAT WAS A JOB NOBODY FANCIED much. Of course, now and again, someone would have a try at it, but without any proper understanding of these things. In a washing you may come across a blob with a glint in it and take it home with you; but you have to get a real expert to tell you whether it's worth keeping or not.

With gold now, it's much simpler. Of course there are different sorts of gold, but it's not nearly as bad as it is with the stones. With the stones you can't go by weight or size at all. One stone may be big and another small and both of them sparkling the same; and yet when you get them tested you'll find the big one is not worth five

kopecks and the little one is just what they're wanting—"a diamond of the first water" they'll tell you it is, and worth a packet.

And sometimes it's still more odd. They'll buy a stone from you, and there, before your very eyes, they'll chip half of it away and throw it among the rubbish. "That part is no good," they'll tell you. "It spoils the lustre." Then they'll grind down what's left to half the size and say proudly: "Now you can see its real brilliance and it won't grow dim in the light either." And there's no doubt about it, the little bit that remains is so alive it seems to be laughing at you. And the way its value goes up, too—it makes you gasp. These things are the devil to understand.

But all that talk about how some stones can keep you in good health, others make you sleep or cheer you up and so forth—to my way of thinking that's a lot of poppycock, just idle chatter for people that have nothing else to do but wag their tongues.

Our old people only told us one story about the precious stones. It's a nut with a good kernel, that story is, and if you've got good teeth, you'll relish it.

Somewhere buried in the ground, so they say, is a stone that's unique. No one, not only in our country but among other peoples as well, no one has ever found it; but everywhere there is talk of it. And yet, whatever they may say, this stone is buried in our Russian earth. Our old folk long ago got to know about it. Just where it is nobody knows, but that's no matter because when the right man sets out to find it, 'twill fly into his hand of itself. That is the special thing about this stone; and it was through a little girl that we got to know about it.

It happened this way, they say.

At Murzinka or thereabouts there was a big mine where they used to extract gold and precious stones. It was a State-controlled mine with officials in badges and bright buttons, floggers in full uniform, drums to summon the men to work, drums to make them run the gauntlet and rods to beat them with. In a word: it was Hell on earth.

In the midst of all this torment there was a little girl called Vasyonka. She'd been born at the mine and had spent all her life there. Her mother had a job as a sort of cook at the head miner's barracks, but her father she had never known.

Everyone knows what sort of life a child like that has to live. Even those who had least reason to do so would give her a pinch or a cuff; they had to have someone to vent their spite on. Indeed, it was the cruellest life a little girl could have. Worse than that of an orphan without father or mother. And there wasn't anyone to see that she didn't work too hard. When quite a baby, barely strong enough to hold the reins, she was put in charge of a cart.

"Why should you always be getting in our way," they said. "You'd better carry sand."

When she was a bit older, they gave her a rake and sent her to sift

the sand with the other women; and it turned out, look you, that she had a great knack for this kind of work. She would pick out a stone more often than any of the other women, and a pretty sort of stone 'twould be, and valuable.

The little girl hadn't any guile in her; if she found a stone she took it along to the mine officials straight away. They, of course, were only too pleased to be of help: some would put the stone into the bank, others into their pockets, and others stuffed them into their cheeks. Not for nothing has it been said: "What the big boss pockets, the little boss must hide further away." But they were all at one in praising little Vasyonka, and they called her by the name of 'Little Lucky-Eyes.' Whichever of the officials was the first to see her, would ask:

"Well, Little Lucky-Eyes? Found anything else?"

Vasyonka would give him what she'd found and the official would start clucking, just like a goose preparing for flight:

"Tak-tak, tak-tak. . . . Go on looking, little girl, go on looking!"

Vasyonka went on looking, and quite enjoyed the work.

Once she found a stone that was as big as a finger and all the mine officials ran up to see it. None of them could steal it that time, so they had to put it into the State Bank. Later, so they say, the Tsar's treasury sent the stone to some foreign land. But that's another story. . . .

Vasyonka's luck did not make things sweeter for the other women. The officials would put on the screw:

"Why does she find so many stones and you only find rubbish, and little enough of that? You're not looking properly."

And so they tried to get their own back by telling tales about her. Altogether life was made as hard as possible for the little girl. And at this point another cur popped up in the shape of the head miner. Tempted by Vasyonka's good fortune, he said:

"I'm going to wed that girl."

For all that he was so old and that you wouldn't come within five paces of him because he stank like carrion on account of his rotten inside, the wretched creature says:

"I'm going to make a lady of you, little girl. Understand that and in future you'll not give the stones you find to anyone but me. Don't show them to anyone else at all."

Vasyonka was tall for her age but she was not nearly old enough to marry. Under the age, she was; thirteen or at the most fourteen. But what difference does age make if an official gives an order! The priests will write any age you like in the registers. Well, Vasyonka, look you, was terrified. She trembled all over when she as much as looked at her evil-smelling suitor, and she quickly gave him the stones she'd found that day, whereupon he grunted:

"Go on looking, Vasyonka, go on looking! When the winter comes you shall sleep in a soft feather-bed."

As soon as he'd gone away, all the other women started jeering

and laughing at Vasyonka, who in any case was so upset she scarcely knew what she was doing. When the drum signal to knock off work sounded she ran to her mother, but what was the good of that? Her mother pitied her, of course, and did all she could to protect her, but what could a poor barracks cook do when the head miner was her boss and could order her to be beaten every day if he chose to?

Autumn went by and Vasyonka went on living as before, but when winter came it was impossible to put the old miner off any longer. Each day he would come to her mother and say:

"Agree to give me your daughter, or it will be the worse for you!"

It was no good telling him she was under age. He would just thrust a piece of paper signed by the priests under her nose:

"Still babbling? It says here in the registers she's 16. Legal age for marrying, that is. If you persist in your obstinacy, I'll have you flogged to-morrow."

So finally her mother gave in:

"It's no good, little daughter, you can't get away from your fate."

But the little daughter—what did she think about it? She was so numbed with fright she couldn't speak a word. And as soon as it began to grow dark she left the mining settlement and ran away. Which way she should go, which road she should take, she had no idea. Her only thought was to get away from the mine.

It was a calm mild evening, but after a while it began to snow. It was a gentle kind of snow, the flakes floating down like tiny feathers. The road ran through the forest and the forest, look you, was full of wolves and other wild beasts. But Vasyonka was not afraid of anything. Her mind was made up:

"Better to be eaten by the wolves than to marry that smelly old man."

So she trudged on and on.

At first she walked quite quickly. Fifteen, twenty versts she walked. She wasn't very warmly clad, but so long as she kept going she didn't feel the cold. On the contrary, she was quite hot. The snow was deep, look you, and it was hard work ploughing through it, but that kept her warm. The snow kept falling and growing thicker and thicker—an abundance of it, there was. At last Vasyonka was so tired and worn out that she sat down at the side of the road.

"I'll have a little rest," she thought, not understanding that to sit down in the open in such weather was the worst thing she could do.

She sat there gazing at the snow, which clung and clung to her, and when after a while she tried to get up she couldn't move. But even this didn't frighten her.

She thought: "I suppose I must sit a little longer and have a proper rest."

And so she rested. By now the snow had completely covered her. And lying there in the middle of the road the form of her looked like an ingot of fine silver.

There was a village close by and luckily, the next morning, a man

from this village, who also did a bit of prospecting for precious stones and gold in summertime, happened to be riding by cutting a road through the snow. Seeing the ingot, his horse pricked up its ears and neighed, but wouldn't go near it. The prospector saw that a human being had been snowed under. He went up to it and found it was not completely frozen, as the arms had not stiffened. He picked up Vasyonka and put her in his sledge, covered her with his overcoat and set off home. There, with the help of his wife, they started to bring Vasyonka round. And—wonder of wonders—she opened her eyes and unclenched her fingers. They looked, and there, sparkling in her hand was a big stone, pure light blue and of the first water. The prospector took fright—people were put in jail for being in possession of such stones—and asked:

"Where did you get it from?"

But Vasyonka answered:

"It just flew into my hand of itself."

"How could that be?"

And Vasyonka told him how it had happened.

When she was almost completely covered with snow, a passage leading underground opened in front of her. The passage was narrow and dark but just wide enough to walk through; there were steps leading down and it was warm. Vasyonka was glad when she saw it:

"None of the mine people could find me here," she thought, and started to go down the steps. She went down and down and at last came to a huge field, so huge that she couldn't see any end to it. The grass in this field grew in tufts and the trees were few and far between and all yellow, as in autumn. Across the field a river flowed. Its waters were dark grey and motionless, as though turned to stone. On the other side of the river, just opposite Vasyonka, was a little hill and on the crest of it were blocks of granite, looking like a table with stools all round it, but much larger than any that human beings would use.

It felt cold and eerie and Vasyonka wanted to turn back, when suddenly a shower of sparks came raining down from the other side of the hill and on the giant table appeared a pile of precious stones. They sparkled with all sorts of different colours and their light roused the waters of the river. It was a lovely sight to behold. At that moment a voice asked:

"For whom are these?"

And from below came an answering voice:

"They are for the Simple."

And instantly the precious stones scattered in a shower of sparks in all directions. Then from the other side of the hill a shower of sparks and precious stones fell on the table. A huge shower of stones it was, at least a cartload, look you. And the stones were bigger, too. And again a voice asked:

"For whom are these stones?"

And the voice from below answered:

"For the Patient."

And as before, the stones scattered in all directions, like a swarm of beetles taking flight. The only difference being that they glittered with all sorts of different colours. Some glowed red; others flashed with green fires; others were pale blue and yellow and every imaginable shade. And they too buzzed as they flew through the air.

As Vasyonka watched these beetles, there was another flash of fire from beyond the hill and a third pile of stones appeared on the table. This pile was quite a small one, but the stones were bigger and of rare beauty. The voice from below cried:

"These are for the Daring and the Lucky of Eye."

And instantly the stones, like little birds, darted down and flew away in every direction, hovering over the field like tiny lanterns. They were flying slowly and leisurely. One of them came towards Vasyonka and like a kitten thrusting its little head forward, nestled in her hand, as if to say: "Here I am, take me!"

The little stone-birds flew away and it became quiet and dark. Vasyonka waited to see what would happen next, and then, on the granite table, there appeared a single stone. It was a simple stone, of five facets, three lengthwise and two crosswise. And instantly everything became warm and light; the grass and the trees burst into green, the birds sang, and the river shone and sparkled and gurgled. Where there had been nothing but naked sand, there was now a thick waving corn-field. And multitudes of people appeared, all looking very gay and merry. Even those who were coming from work walked along singing a song.

This time Vasyonka herself called out:

"And who is this for, little uncles?"

And from below came the reply:

"For him who leads the People along the right road. With this key-stone man can open the earth and then everything will be as you have just seen it."

Then it became dark and everything vanished.

At first the prospector and his wife doubted the story; then they wondered how else the girl could have come by the stone in her hand. They asked her who she was and where she came from and Vasyonka told them her whole story without concealing anything and begged them:

"Little Aunt, Little Uncle! Don't tell the people at the mine about me!"

The man and wife thought it over and then said to her:

"Very well then, stay with us. We will protect you somehow. But we shall call you Fenya. You must answer to that name."

The couple, look you, had lost their own daughter not long since and her name had been Fenya. As it happened she would have been just of an age with Vasyonka. And they based their hopes on the fact that their village was not on State land, but stood on the Demidov estates.

And so it came about. The Demidovs' steward noticed the

newcomer in the village, but what did it matter to him? She hadn't run away from him, look you. An extra pair of hands was always useful, and he gave her a job straight away.

Of course, life wasn't all milk and honey at the Demidov village either. But it wasn't as bad as at the State mine. And the stone that had been in Vasyonka's hand helped a bit too. The prospector was able to sell it on the quiet, not of course for its real value, but for quite a tidy sum. And so they were able to breathe a little.

When she was of an age, Vasyonka married a decent young fellow from the same village. They lived together to the end of their days and had many children and grandchildren.

It may be that as an old woman Fenya had even forgotten her old name and nickname. She never spoke about her childhood at the mines but if ever anyone talked about 'lucky' finds, she would always break in:

"There's nothing difficult about finding precious stones; but they bring little happiness to us working-folk. Far better to bestir ourselves to find the key to the earth."

And she would say too:

"There is indeed a key-stone to the earth. But until the time comes, nobody will be able to find it; neither the Simple, nor the Patient, nor the Brave or Lucky. But when the people will march along the right road to their destiny it will come of itself into the hand of the man who walks at their head and leads them.

"On that day all the riches of the earth will be opened and the whole of life will be transformed. Let us live in the hope of that day."

THE CAT'S EARS

AT THE TIME OF THIS STORY THE VERKHNY AND ILYINSKY MINES DIDN'T so much as exist. There were only the Sisert mine and our Polyevsky here. True, they did scratch up a bit of iron at Severny, but it didn't amount to much. The Sisert mine now—that was the place to be! It was right on the high-road to the Cossack country, look you. People were always walking or riding by. Besides, the men themselves used to take the iron to the wharf on the Revda. There were plenty of people to be met with on the way, and many were the things they had to tell you; and there were villages all round, too.

Life at Polyevsky, as compared with Sisert, was dull enough. In those days but little iron was made; it was mostly copper that they smelted and they used to take the copper to the wharf in convoys. So it wasn't easy for our fellows to stop and talk to passers-by. What with the mounted guards and everything it was practically impossible. There was only one village anywhere near—Kosoy Brod. Apart from that there were nothing but forests and mountains and marshes

all round. To speak truth, our people lived in a pit and couldn't see over the top.

And that was just what the Mine-owner wanted, of course. He knew things would be quiet here, whereas Sisert now, he had to keep an eye on that mine.

Sisert was his chief mine and it was there he spent most of his time. Here at Polyevsky, he just appointed a lot of watchmen and told them to keep a careful eye on our people:

"Keep them in order and see that no strangers get in."

Truth to tell, there was little chance of any strangers coming to our mine, seeing how cut off from everywhere it was. A road had been made to Sisert, but it was a very poor one in those days, they say. It ran through the marshes; logs had been laid across it for miles and it didn't half shake your belly up when the wheels bumped over them. People didn't use the road much—there wasn't the constant coming and going there is now. The mine-owner's people and the watchmen—they were the only ones who used it, and they went on horseback, so the bad road didn't worry them so much. The mine-owner himself only came to Polyevsky by sledge. As soon as the ground was suitable for sledges, he'd start coming so as to make up for what he'd missed in the summer-time. And he always tried to come when people least expected him. For instance he'd go away one night and turn up again at supper-time the next evening. Wanted to catch someone out, you see. So our people knew that in winter they'd always got to be on the look-out: he might turn up at any time. But he never used to come by the carriage-road: he didn't fancy bumping over the logs; and he didn't come on horseback because he couldn't. Too old, they say he was: you can't expect an old bag of bones like that to ride. So things were a bit easier for our folks in summer. For savage as the Manager was, you could be sure the Owner would find still more to be angry about!

But one day the Owner turned up in autumn, just at the time of the bad roads; and he didn't go to the Works or the mine first, as he usually did, but went straight to the Manager's office. He called all the officials together, and the priests as well, and he didn't let them go till late in the evening. The next morning he went away to Severny —and that same day he was back in the town. He'd galloped right through all the slush and he had a whole pack of guards with him. Our people wondered among themselves: "What is the meaning of all this? How can we find out?"

Nowadays it would be easy enough. You'd only hop over or ride over to Sisert. But under serfdom it was different. You'd have to have some good excuse for going—and even then they might not let you. And you couldn't just slip away unawares because they kept a roll of everyone's name. Had you in the palm of their hand, they had. All the same, one young fellow offered to go.

"I'll slip away to Sisert on Saturday night," he said, "as soon as I come off my shift, and I'll be back in time for the roll-call on Sunday

evening. I have friends at Sisert and they'll tell me what it's all about."

He went off as he said, but he didn't come back again. After a bit, they told the Manager, but he wouldn't lift a finger to look for the young fellow; and this struck them as rather curious: what was going on? Later two other fellows tried to get to Sisert and they didn't come back either.

The only change at Polyevsky itself was that the watchmen started going round the houses three times a day and counting the men to see that nobody was missing. If anyone wanted to go into the forest to get some firewood or go into the fields, they had to get permission; and they were only allowed to go in groups and under escort.

"We can't let you go by yourselves," the Manager told them. "Three of your fellows have run away as it is."

Even the men's families were not allowed into the forest. The Manager had barriers put up on the roads; and his watchmen were picked men—you couldn't get a word out of them.

Well, it soon got round that something was happening at Sisert —something the Owner and his underlings were not at all pleased about. And the men at the Works and the mine whispered to each other:

"Somehow or other we've got to find out what it's all about."

At last a young girl, one of the mining folk, came forward and said:

"Let me go to Sisert, uncles. They don't put us girls on the roll, you know, and they never come to the hut where granny and I are living, because they know there aren't any men there. Maybe I could manage to get there. 'Twould be easier for a girl."

She was a brave girl—these mining lasses usually are—but the men wouldn't agree to her going at first.

"How could a young girl like you walk forty versts through the forest, all by yourself? It's autumn now and there are wolves about. They'd gobble you up."

"I'll go on Sunday morning," she told them. "The wolves wouldn't dare to come out in daylight. And anyhow I'll take an axe with me, just in case."

"But do you know anyone at Sisert?" they asked her.

"O there's plenty of women there. They'll tell me what we want to know all right."

Some of the men weren't content with this answer.

"Women?" they said. "What do women know about such things?"

"They know as much as men know and sometimes more," she replied.

The men grumbled a bit more and finally they said:

"It's true, Little Dunya, it might be easier for you to go than for a man. But we feel ashamed to send a girl on such a dangerous errand. The wolves might get you."

Just then a young man came running up. He had heard about Dunya's suggestion and he said:

"I'll go with her."

Dunya blushed a little, but she didn't decline his offer.

"'Twill be less lonely than going alone," she said, "but supposing they catch you when we get to Sisert."

"I won't let them," he said.

So off the two of them went. They didn't follow the road, of course; they went round by the backs of houses and into the thick of the forest, so that they shouldn't be seen. All went smoothly until they came to the village of Kosoy Brod. When they got within sight of the bridge there, they saw three men standing on it. They were sentries! The Chusovaya hadn't frozen over yet, but it was too cold to try to swim across the river higher up or lower down. From behind the trees Dunya took a good look round and then she said:

"No, dear friend Matvey, Fate does not will it, it seems, that we should go to Sisert together. 'Twould be foolish for us both to get caught. You go back now as quick as you can, before they notice your absence; and I, I'll see if I can get across by means of woman's cunning."

Of course, Matvey wouldn't agree to this at first, but she insisted. They argued it over for a while and then agreed as follows: Matvey would keep watch from the edge of the forest. If they let her past, he would go back; but if they stopped her, he would run out and try and drive them away. Dunya crept along the edge of the wood, hid the axe she was carrying under her clothes and ran out of the forest. She ran straight towards the men on the bridge, shouting and screaming as she came:

"Oi, uncles, a wolf! a wolf!"

The sentries looked up to see what the noise was, saw it was only a girl who'd taken fright and laughed. One of them stuck his foot out to try to trip her up; but Dunya had her eyes open all right and she ran past, still shouting:

"Oi, a wolf! a wolf!"

The sentries ran after her:

"Stop that girl! Don't let her get away! Stop her!"

Matvey watched what happened and said to himself:

"She's got through! Well, there's a girl for you! Doesn't get nabbed herself and doesn't let her friend get nabbed either! Now she can get through the forest easily. But I hope to goodness she gets to Sisert before evening and the wolves come out."

So Matvey returned home. Everything went smoothly; no one had noticed his absence. The next morning he told the other miners what had happened; and they realized now that the three men who'd tried to get to Sisert and hadn't come back again must have been imprisoned at Kosoy Brod.

"They've got them chained up at the prison there, look you. That's why the Manager wouldn't send the guards to look for them:

he knew they were there. If only our little bird could get back the way she went!"

They talked the matter over for a while and then went their ways. And meanwhile what was Dunya doing? She followed the road to Sisert, keeping to the edge of the forest so as not to be seen. Once she saw some of the Polyevsky watchmen coming back from Sisert and crouched down in the undergrowth till they were safely past. She got very weary, of course, but she managed to reach the outskirts of Sisert before nightfall. On the road there were sentries, too, but she managed to get past them without much difficulty: she turned off into the forest and presently came to some gardens where there was a well. Several women were fetching water from this well and Dunya went up and joined them without anyone noticing her comin g. An old woman said to her:

"Where do you come from, daughter? You're not from our parts, are you?"

Dunya decided to confide in the old woman.

"I'm from Polyevsky," she told her.

The old woman was very astonished to hear this:

"How ever did you manage to get here? There are sentries everywhere. They won't allow our men to go to Polyevsky, and those who've tried to get there haven't come back again."

Dunya told her how she'd got past the sentries, and the old woman said:

"You come with me. I live alone and they never search my house. And even if they did, I could tell them you're my grand-daughter from across the river. She's rather like you. You're a bit fatter, that's all. What is your name?"

"Dunya."

"Well, that's just right; my grand-daughter's name is Dunya, too."

The old woman told Dunya what she'd come to find out. The Mine-owner, it seems, had gone off somewhere a long way off, though messengers were going to and fro between him and the Manager every week. The Owner had been sending all sorts of orders and Vanka Shvarev, the Manager, had been reading them out to the men. The iron works had been closed down and the men had been put to digging trenches and putting up barricades on the Schelkunsk road. They were expecting an attack from that direction. Some people said the Bashkirs had risen, but in fact that was not quite how it was. Some of the far-off factories, villages and Cossack settlements had risen and the Bashkirs had joined them. They'd been taking the mine-owners and the gentry by the throat and the man who was leading the rebellion was a fellow called Pugachev. Some people said he was a Tsar, others that he came from the people. One thing was certain: he meant freedom to the people and death to the factory-owners and the gentry. So that was why our old fox had run away. He was scared!

Dunya learned that there were house-searchings in Sisert, too, and that they took a roll-call of the workers three times a day. Things were even stricter than at Polyevsky. They locked whole families up on the slightest pretext and put them in chains, too.

A man might come running up and say:

"I'm sorry—I'm a little bit late."

And they'd say:

"This will teach you not to be late again," and they'd put his family in prison for a couple of days.

They bullied the people cruelly and the Manager himself was like a savage watchdog—only worse!

In spite of this, as soon as the evening roll had been called some of the men came to the old woman's house and got Dunya to tell them how things were at Polyevsky. When she'd finished, they said:

"We sent a whole lot of our fellows to you, but none of them ever came back."

"'Twas the same with us," said Dunya. "Whoever went never came back again. They must have nabbed them all at the Chusovaya bridge."

They talked it over and debated how Dunya could get back to Polyevsky. They would certainly be keeping a watch for her at Kosoy Brod. How could she get past? Then somebody said:

"She could go through Tersutsky Marsh and Golian. But the trouble is she doesn't know these parts and there's no one to show her the way."

"Haven't we got any brave girls?" the old woman said. "They don't keep a record of the girls here either and there's plenty of them have been to Tersutsky to pick cranberries. They can show her the way. But mind you explain which way she must go after Golian, otherwise she'll get lost and won't get back before nightfall. And then she'd be an easy prey for the wolves."

Well, they explained which way she must go. First she had to cross Tersutsky Marsh, then to follow Mochalovka river as far as Golian marsh, which would lead her straight to the Chusovaya river. The river was quite narrow there, so she'd be able to get across somehow, and once on the other side, she'd be in the grounds of the Polyevsky mines.

"If you happen to be late, there'll be less danger that way. The strip of land between Golian and Dumna Mountain is where the Brown Cat walks. It never does us workers any harm, but it frightens the wolves away by sticking up its ears. So wolves don't come to that part much. But you mustn't rely on that, so hurry all you can and try to get back before dark. After all, it may be just idle talk about the cat. Who has ever seen it?"

They found some girls who were willing to risk showing Dunya the way to the Mochalovka. Early next morning, while it was still dark, they crept out of Sisert without the sentries' noticing.

"The wolves won't attack us in a bunch. They're frightened, 'tis

said. But the quicker we and our guest here can get home again the better."

The bunch of girls walked along, chattering merrily. After a while they even started singing. They knew the way, for they'd often been to Tersutsky Marsh to pick cranberries: it was natural for them to sing.

They went as far as the Mochalovka with Dunya and then they parted. It was still quite early; the sun was shining brightly; and all was as it should be. A man they met told them it wasn't more than fifteen versts across Golian Marsh to Polyevsky. It was still daylight and there weren't any wolves about. There was nothing to be frightened of.

So they said good-bye to Dunya and left her.

When they'd gone, she didn't feel so sure of herself. She'd never been this way before and the forest frightened her rather. She wasn't a nervous sort of girl, but she couldn't help looking back over her shoulder every now and then. And she wasn't sure of the way any longer.

She went up and down, trying to find the path that led to the river and before she was aware of it, darkness came on. She could hear wolves howling on all sides—and in those days there were many wolves in these parts. Nowadays you still hear a few round here, near the factory, in autumn, but then there were lots of them.

Things looked bad for Dunya. To have such important news and then not be able to bring it! And she didn't want to lose her young life either. She hadn't forgotten that young fellow who came as far as the bridge with her, that Matvey. But the wolves were quite close now, so what could she do? If she ran, they'd run after her and tear her to shreds. And if she climbed up a tree they'd just sit and wait till she fell down.

Walking down a slope, she saw the marsh descending to the Chusovaya river, just as the man had told her. "If only I can get to the Chusovaya," she thought.

She walked along quietly, the wolves at her heels. A whole pack of them, there were. She still had the axe with her, of course—but what use was that?

But all of a sudden she saw two blue flames ahead of her. There was no doubt about it: it was the 'Cat's Ears'! They were broad at the bottom and tapered away to nothing at the top. They were about fifty paces ahead of her.

Dunya didn't stop to ask herself what the flames were or where they came from—she just ran towards them for all she was worth. She knew that wolves were frightened of fire, look you.

She ran up and there really were two fires there and a little mound between them that looked like a cat's head. Dunya stopped in between the two fires and looked back. The wolves had fallen back and the fires grew bigger and bigger and the mound seemed to be getting bigger, too. Dunya was astonished at the way the fires were burning,

for they didn't appear to be stacked with wood. She plucked up her courage and put her hand out towards the flames—but she couldn't feel any heat from them. She put her hand still closer—the flames seemed to leap aside, just as if a cat had jerked its ear aside, and then burned steadily as before.

Dunya felt a little frightened, but she couldn't run away to be chased by wolves. She stood there between the fires and they rose higher and higher, until they towered above her. Dunya picked up a stone from the ground. It smelt of sulphur. Then she remembered what the man at Sisert had said about a Brown Cat. She'd heard tell of something of the sort before—about a cat with ears of fire that lived in the sands where the gold-spotted copper was found. People had often seen these ears, but the cat itself no one had ever set eyes on. It lived underground, 'twas said.

Dunya stood between the fires and thought to herself: "Whatever shall I do? The wolves have gone away, but how long will it be before they come back again? If I go away from the fire, they'll run after me again. Yet I can't stay here till morning because it's too cold. I wouldn't last till morning."

As she thought this, the fires went out and Dunya was left in the dark. She looked all round, fearing to see the wolves again. There were none. But how could she find her way in the darkness?

All at once, the fires reappeared, this time a little further ahead. Dunya ran quickly towards them. She ran and ran but could not catch up with them. Finally she found herself on the bank of the Chusovaya: the ears were already on the other side of the river.

The ice was too thin to bear her; she couldn't possibly walk across. So she broke off a couple of light poles and started to cross to the other side. She managed it somehow, falling over several times and with the ice cracking beneath her. The poles helped her a lot.

She wasted no time, but ran after the cat's ears. And as she looked round, she recognized where she was. It was the sands at the mine. She'd sometimes worked there. And she could have found her way by herself now—even at night-time. But she ran on after the ears, thinking to herself:

"Having rescued me from such misfortune, they're hardly likely to lead me astray now."

Just as she was thinking this, the flames of the ears seemed to flicker and then to burn brightly. It was as if they were giving her a sign: "Even so, little girl. You judged rightly."

The ears led Dunya as far as Povarensky mine, which is just at the foot of Dumna Mountain. There she was, back at the Works again.

It was still dark. Dunya made her way to the hut where she lived. She had to step warily, of course, and if she heard anyone coming, she hid behind a gate-post or crept through a back-garden. When she reached the hut she heard the sound of voices within.

She listened and realized what it was: they were keeping watch

for her. The Manager had ordered the hut to be kept under watch both night and day. "If that Dunya manages to creep back again, that's where she'll go," he said to himself. And he inspected the watch himself, to make sure they never left the hut.

Dunya did not know this. She only knew that there was some stranger in her granny's hut. She was afraid to show herself, yet she was so cold she could scarcely bear it. Finally she crept along the back-streets to the hut where Matvey lived, the young fellow who'd come as far as Kosoy Brod with her. She tapped at his window gently and then hid. Matvey came running out:

"Who is it?"

She told him who she was. The young man was very glad to see her.

"Go into the bath-house," he said. "It's been heated. I'll hide you there till to-morrow and then we'll find a safer place for you."

He put Dunya in the warm bath-house and then ran out to tell people he could trust about her return:

"She's come back! Our little bird has flown back!"

They all came rushing up to see her and question her, and Dunya told them all she knew. At the end she told them about the Cat's Ears, too:

"If it hadn't been for them, the wolves would have eaten me."

The men didn't pay much heed to this part of her talk. "She's worn out, poor child," they thought. "It's made her imagine things."

"Have something to eat and then lie down and sleep," they told her. "We'll keep guard over you till morning, and in the meanwhile we'll think out some safer hiding-place for you."

And indeed sleep was just what Dunya needed. The warmth of the bath-house had made her so drowsy that she could hardly sit up.

They gave her something to eat and then she fell asleep. Matvey and five other young men kept watch. But it was night-time and quiet and there was this exciting news that Dunya had brought. The young men spoke more loudly than they ought to have done. Other people came up to hear the news and they in their turn told this one and that one and took counsel as to what to do. In a word, there was quite a disturbance. And the watchmen noticed it and started searching the houses. One and another were not at home and in Matvey's hut were five men who ought not to have been there.

"What are you doing here?" they asked.

The men gave the first excuse that came into their heads. The watchmen didn't believe them, of course, and started a search. The men saw there was nothing else for it, and took up their sticks. The watchmen were armed, to be sure, but in the darkness sticks were the best weapons. The young men gave them a good drubbing. But more watchmen turned up in their place. Three or four times as many of them. So the young men had to give way. The watchmen shot one of them, but the others managed to get away.

Dunya had long ago jumped up. She ran out of the bath-house

and there, up on top of Dumna Mountain, she saw two enormous blue flames blazing. It was as if the cat was hiding behind the mountain and just sticking its ears up over the top. And the flames stretched towards the factory. Dunya ran out into the open and shouted:

"They are our fires! our fires! Rally to them, brothers!" And she ran up the mountain towards them.

Meanwhile tumult had broken out at the settlement. The alarm had been sounded. The people ran out into the streets and thought there must be a fire on the mountain-side and ran up to see. When they got near the fire they stopped, for they were frightened by the flames. But Dunya went straight on. She stood in the middle of the flames and shouted:

"Seize the masters! their time is over. In the other mines they killed them off long ago!"

After this the guards and the other watchmen had a bad time of it. The people rose in a body, look you. The watchman fled in all directions. But they couldn't get far when the people were after them. They caught a good many, but the Manager himself managed to get away to the town. Owing to carelessness they let him escape. They released all the men who'd been chained up, of course. After this the fires on the mountain disappeared.

The next day everyone assembled on Dumna Mountain and Dunya told them what she'd learned at Sisert. Some of the people, old men for the most part, raised objections:

"Who knows what will come of this? You were wrong to rouse our hopes like that last night."

But many others supported Dunya:

"We must go to Kosoy Brod. Some of our lads are in prison there. Have you forgotten about them?"

A band of young men ran off to Kosoy Brod. They knocked down the watchmen there and set their own men free and also five men from Sisert. And they roused the people of Kosoy Brod, too, and told them what was happening in the country.

The young men went back and found there was still an argument going on up on Dumna Mountain. In the young men's absence the old men had had things all their own way. They were frightening the people by telling them:

"We've done a terrible thing, killing those watchmen like that."

The young men shouted:

"It served them right!"

And the men who'd been imprisoned at Kosoy Brod—they backed them up, of course. They said to the old men:

"If you're frightened, stay here. But we—we're going to fight for our rightful destiny."

And with that the gathering broke up. The old men, to their misfortune, stayed where they were and even helped to get the rebels under the knout. For soon afterwards the Manager came back from the town with a troop of soldiers and the guards from Sisert were

brought here, too. They crushed the people brutally. At first the Manager was even more brutal than he'd been before, but after a short time he stopped being violent. He'd been warned what would happen to him if he didn't. After that he tried to insinuate himself with the old men—the ones who'd betrayed the young ones. But they still had sore backs from the flogging they'd got for it and wouldn't have anything to do with him. So the Manager saw it was no good and went away. And he was never seen at our mines again. Either he found a good hiding-place for himself, or else, maybe, he fell into the hands of the right people and they wrung his ugly neck for him.

As to the young men themselves, they formed a band and took to the forest, with Matvey as their leader.

And the little bird, Dunya, flew away with them.

Many stories are told about this brave girl, but this is the only one I remember. . . .

THE DEMIDOV CAFTANS

SOUTH OF THE BOUNDARY OF OUR MINE THERE'S A LAKE. ITKUL LAKE it's called. You've heard of it, I expect.

Anyone who's in our mines or worked as a prospector here will have been to this lake many a time. It's nice and close and it's cram-full of fish. A man on a holiday, even if he's not an angler, look you, will hurry off to Itkul, thinking to himself: "Just for once in a way it'll be nice to have some fish soup for a change." You know what prospectors' grub is like: the poor fellows are always pining for some good cooked food.

Yes, and the man who is lucky enough to have a gold nugget in his pocket, he goes off to Lake Itkul, too. You see, the lake lies outside the boundaries of this mine and our officials haven't any authority there. There are some little villages by the lake; they're only poor little Bashkir villages, but all the same you can get what you want there if you're out for a spree: wine and meat and all the rest of it—not to mention fish. There's only one thing wrong there: the Bashkirs don't know how to cook the Russian way. An awful curse it is to our fellows who are always after eating soup. But apart from that you couldn't find a better place for spending your holiday.

There are lakes round about our mine, too, but what is in them? Stagnant water in low hollows, with reeds growing all round the edges so that you can't get near to fish. But Itkul Lake is high up, and its banks are all sand and rocks and as dry as can be. There are pine trees all round it, glowing like so many candles. Beautiful they are. The water itself is as clear as a mirror. You can see all the stones at the bottom. Yes, it's a slightly reddish colour: it looks just as if

someone had washed meat in it. You see, the sand at the bottom of the lake is red like meat and it's this that changes the colour of the water. That is why the lake is called Itkul Lake. *It* is the Bashkir word for 'meat' and *kul* is Bashkir for 'lake'. Thus you get Itkul, the meat lake.

One story has it that the first men who came to the lake boasted to their fellows:

"See what a lot of victuals there are in the water. The whole lake is full of meat."

But there is another story connected with it. Our old folk used to tell it. In the days before there was pig-iron, they used to carry copper-ore along the Chusovaya river and heard all about the affairs of those parts and passed on what they heard to us.

They said it was the Demidovs who made the water red. Not the Demidovs of Tagil but the ones who built the Shaitansky foundry at Kasli. They belonged to the same branch of the Demidov family, but they ran their businesses quite separately. And that is what all the trouble was about.

It was this way. The Tsar gave Demidov a state metal works here and an area of land and told him to build as many works as he could. Demidov sent his son Akinty to our parts and Akinty turned this way and that way and built many new works: one at Shural, one at Bingi, two at Tagil and so on. Old Demidov came this way himself, but he was more interested in the working of the plants, whereas Akinty went on putting up new ones; altogether he put up a score of them. The nearest to our Sisert works that Akinty started was the one at Revda. And it was about this one at Revda, while it was still being built, that the trouble started.

Akinty Demidov grew rich—as rich as rich can be. The ore was good here, you see; there was plenty of timber close at hand; and he only paid just enough to keep the men from starving. So how could he fail to grow rich? But old Demidov had two other sons besides Akinty. They were manufacturers, too, though not in these parts.

One of the sons—his name was the same as his father's: Nikita—had a works at Brinsk; and others, too, to be sure. He also was very rich, though not to be compared with Akinty. And this Brinsk manufacturer, Nikita, decided to come to our parts.

"Akinty will do me a brotherly favour and give me a bit of land there," he thought to himself.

He himself, now, had for a long time been interested in the piece of land where the Revda works now stands, for he had prospected there and on other mountains nearby.

But Akinty bluntly turned the shafts on his dear brother.

"My pocket," he said, "has no brothers. I am going to build a works there myself."

Nikita was reluctant to give in.

"Besides," he said, "our deceased parent told me about the place. One might say he promised it to me."

Akinty just laughed at him.

"Say what you like about our late lamented father, but he wasn't such a fool as to let a place like that, where the metal can be loaded straight on to the river, slip out of his hands."

Well, Nikita saw he couldn't make Akinty yield, so he brought a law suit against him about the mines. "It was I who discovered the place," he said, "and now he's building a plant there." But what good was it going to law against Akinty when Akinty had the Tsar behind him! All Nikita gained by it was permission to use the mines if he built a smelting works somewhere near. And how could he do that when all the surrounding land belonged to Akinty?

Then another thing happened, look you. The land on the left bank of the Chusovaya river bordered on that of the Stroganov family. Up till then the Stroganovs had not taken any interest in iron works, but when they saw how rich Akinty was getting they hastened to follow his example and themselves built the Bilimbay works quite a short distance away. And they too started a law suit against Akinty, claiming that his works at Revda had been put up on Stroganov land. Well, Nikita saw that there was nothing to be won here if the Stroganovs were out for the land too, so he started looking round a bit on the right bank of the Chusovaya. On that side, look you, in the desolate Shaitan valley, stood a little Bashkir village which had never been given to any manufacturer. So Nikita began making up to these Bashkirs. He saw that he would have to coax them.

"Let me have this place," he said. "I want to build a works here. If you will, I'll move you to any place you choose at my own expense. I'll build new huts for you and give you money to fit them up, and as for your old men, I'll give them each a new red caftan every year. And every holiday I'll send you meat—all you want and more. I ask you: as things are what sort of life do you lead here? How often do you eat meat now?"

The little village was indeed very poor. Truth to tell, they only had one horse to every three families and all they got to eat was what they could catch in the lake. Nothing but fish and fish. So the thought of the meat made their mouths water; and the old men, for their part, liked the idea of strutting about in red caftans. So they came to terms with Nikita and signed a paper saying they would leave the place.

So Demidov put up his works in the Shaitan Valley and moved the Bashkirs to another lake, a long way off, almost a hundred versts from where they lived before.

Of course, he didn't send all of them away. Some of the younger ones stayed behind and worked for him. Young folk, as is well known, always like to be in the thick of everything.

At first things went smoothly. The Bashkirs were quite satisfied with the fishing at the new lake; and on holidays Demidov sent them meat—horseflesh and mutton. The red caftans also arrived every year. Everything was done as it had been promised.

But it was not Nikita himself who was building the works, but his son Vasily. That is why the Shaitan works is still known as Vasilevsky works. This Vasily was still quite young and hadn't had time to grow crafty and cruel; and he carried out the agreement to the letter. And anyway, what was it to the Demidoys to send away a few loads of horseflesh and mutton?

But one day along came Nikita himself to the works. They say that just before this his wife had run away from him, taking a lot of his money with her and leaving an even greater sum of debts to pay: "Pay up, dear husband, but I don't want to live with you any more." Well, Nikita was in a mighty rage about this and he went about finding fault with everything he saw; and when he found that the meat was being sent to the Bashkirs, he turned on his son like a wild beast:

"What do you think you're doing? Want to follow in your mother's footsteps, do you? She was a rare one for throwing money away and squandering other people's property!"

Vasily said:

"Come, dad, there's nothing to get so excited about. I only kill the horses that are no good to us. Instead of carting them off to the refuse-pit I make a present of them to the Bashkirs, and if I do throw in a sheep or two, that's not much."

But the old man would not be appeased:

"Give a sheep away here and a sheep there—and what will you have left for yourself."

Vasily reminded him of the agreement he had made.

But his father shouted at him:

"You've got to keep your wits about you in every agreement. And you—you haven't any wits: all you've got in your noddle is sand!"

Then he sent for his bailiff and told him what he wanted done. The bailiff, of course, was delighted to be of service. To creatures like that, making game of people is dearer than meat.

"I will do as you order, Nikita Nikitich," he said. "Have no fear, all shall be carried out in the most fitting way. We'll give them such a treat that they'll teach their grand-children how to open their mouths for Demidov fare."

And so it was. The Demidov bailiff set off with a train of waggons loaded with meat; and with him went a bodyguard on horseback, armed with guns, for it was a long distance to the Bashkir village and many things might happen on the way.

The old men rejoiced when they saw the waggons:

"Ai, Demid is good! Yakshi-bai, we thank him! We thank him!"

And they gave orders for the pots to be prepared for the meat.

But when the coverings were taken off the waggons it was seen that they contained nothing but pork—whole carcasses of pigs with their trotters jutting out in every direction.

The old men stepped back in horror, of course:

"Ai-yai! Our law forbids us to eat the flesh of dungiz. Demid has made a mistake. Aiya-i-yai!"

It was no mistake, of course, but done on purpose. The bailiff shouted at them:

"We have brought you your meat. Eat it! What is all this talk about? It is good meat. If you do not wish to have it, write out a paper absolving our master from sending you any more."

Among the Bashkirs present were some who worked at the foundry. They were on holiday, you see, and had come to visit their own people. They had often hewn ore together with Russians, and a miner is not faddy about his food; he'll eat pork, horsemeat or anything, so long as there are not many maggots in it.

Well, these fellows saw they'd been tricked and they joined in the argument. And arguments, if persisted in, usually lead to blows. The Demidov bodyguard started threatening the Bashkirs with their swords, but this had no effect; and the example of the miners emboldened the others and they took up their axes and surrounded the waggons. The bailiff saw that things looked serious and gave orders for the waggons to turn back. The Bashkirs continued to shout and scream, but they let them go. The bailiff took the waggons a little way up the road and then ordered his men to cut the pork into pieces and throw it into the lake. And when the Bashkirs saw that they were polluting their lake out of spite, they charged at them. The bailiff ordered his men to fire and some of the Bashkirs were wounded, but they managed to capture one of the waggons and some of the men of the bodyguard. And they set about them and beat them severely. But after a while it came to an end, for the Bashkirs were weary. And the bailiff managed to get away.

Well, of course, the usual followed. A trial. The knout. The officials went to the Bashkir village and the first thing they did was to hunt for the miners. But they were nowhere to be found and their families denied all knowledge of them.

"They were nothing to do with us," they said. "Just people who happened to be passing this way."

So they laid hands on the old men who'd been given the Demidov caftans each year. They put them on trial and sentenced them to be flogged with knouts by the lakeside at the very spot where the fight had taken place. And needless to say they flogged them mercilessly: their backs were a mass of blood and their flesh in tatters. And the son of a bitch who'd caused the whole business went about boasting to everyone:

"They won't forget me in a hurry. They wouldn't go about in the red Demidov caftans, so they'll have to wear my caftans instead! They were made to fit. But are they comfortable to wear?"

Somebody in the crowd threatened him:

"Just you wait, you swine! We'll cut you out a caftan to fit you perfectly! And without a single seam, too."

And so it came to pass. Soon afterwards the Demidov bailiff

disappeared. They searched and searched but they could not find him anywhere. Then Vasily Demidov received a letter, written in Russian.

The letter said that a strange man, dressed in a red caftan, was on a rock in the middle of Itkul Lake. He would not talk to anyone, but he appeared to be one of Demidov's men.

Demidov sent someone to see what this nonsense was about.

In the middle of the lake was a rock which jutted out of the water. It was a big rock and could be seen from afar. And there on this Shaitan Rock, as it was called, stood a man. He was standing like a living man, with arms outstretched, and he was wearing a red garment. When Demidov's men came closer to the rock, they saw that it was the body of the missing bailiff. He had been skinned from his neck to his knees and all the skin was tied round his neck.

And that, they say, is the reason why ever since the lake has been called Itkul.

Of course the village had to suffer for it. Some of the Bashkirs were put in prison, some were flogged, some were sent to Nerchinsk to penal servitude for life. But those who survived lost all faith in the Demidovs and indeed in all manufacturers. They did all they could to harm the works that were built; and when Pugachev revolted, these Itkul people were among the first who rallied to him. Although the village was tiny and stood in a remote spot—it soon made itself known.

The man who was owner here at that time punished them more severely than anyone else:

"Beware of the people of Itkul! Keep an eye on them! They're the most desperate people and the greatest enemies of our works in the whole country."

MARKO'S HILL

THE FOLK WHO OWN THESE MINES OF OURS, THE TURCHANINOV PEOPLE, named their sons Petro and Marko alternately. For instance, if the father was called Petro Markich, the son would be Marko Petrovich and so on. The Demidov family, now, at Tagil—they were all either Akinty or Nikita; but the Turchaninovs were all Petros or Markos. They must have taken a fancy to the names. There used to be a fashion for that sort of thing.

The present young master that's not come of age yet—his name's Marko too, look you. But there you are; that's their affair: it doesn't make any difference to us working chaps. Whether he be Petro or Marko he's still the master. . . . It's not a question of Christian names.

But almost in the middle of the Sisert mining district there's a hill called Marko's Hill. Some say it was named after Marko Turchaninov. It must have been a favourite hunting ground of his, they think,

or something of that kind. Well, that's all idle talk. I don't suppose a single Turchaninov has ever been near the place. It's a desolate sort of spot and there are marshes all round. The gentry don't like walking about in land like that; their feet might get wet and their noses begin to run. And there's nothing worth mining in those parts, though they do pick up a piece of mica there sometimes.

The hill got its name from quite a different Marko. There's no mystery about it. The story was told me by my old grandfather. He was quite small when it happened, A hundred years ago, it was, or even more.

At this time there lived in the works a gentlewoman named Koltovskaya. Her maiden name had also been Turchaninov but she married some general or other and became Koltovskaya. Why she came to live in Sisert, whether she was a widow or separated from her husband—I don't know. But one thing I do know. There were never any stories told at the works about any other old gentlewoman —only about this Koltovskaya. She left her mark, as you might say. Even to-day, if a girl or a married woman goes off on the loose, people say: "She wants to play the Koltovskaya."

This Koltovskaya woman now, she was so greedy for men it was downright astonishing. She had plenty of young gentlemen around her, of course. We all know how they carry on. What else have they to do with themselves? But this lady, she wasn't satisfied with men of her own kind. She didn't turn up her nose at the likes of us working men, provided a man was handsome and well set-up. Rumour would come from Sisert that Koltovskaya had taken on a new coachman and sacked the old one.

Everyone knew what that meant all right! And she was always taking on new coachmen. The coachmen didn't have any say in the matter: it was better than being sent down the mine anyway. They'd joke about it and it would never enter their heads that maybe, after all, it was worse than being sent down the mine!

Well, one day along comes this Koltovskaya to our Polevsky works. It happened to be a holiday, the feast of Peter and Paul, when naturally we always had a bit of a celebration. After the church service the whole factory assembled on the hill yonder, by the old dam. First the boys would wrestle and then it would be the men's turn. They liked nothing better than to show off their strength. And this played straight into the hands of the gentry. They gave prizes to the best wrestlers and praised and encouraged them.

The men who worked in the mine, though terribly thin, had great strength in their arms and legs. And the men from the works hated being bested by them. The factory workers, too, were hefty fellows, especially those who worked in the blooming mills. Even if you had tackled a fellow with a rupture from over-strain—you wouldn't be able to throw him.

At this time there was an apprentice at the mill named Marko. His surname was Chipushtanov, but he was nicknamed Beregovik.

Och, what a fellow he was, to be sure! Tall, quick-witted, clean of person and as strong as a bear! And though young, he'd been carrying all before him for two years running: no one could stand up against him.

Naturally the mine didn't care for being bested by the mill. So they looked around to find a challenger and picked on a fellow of theirs named Onisim.

Now this Onisim of theirs, truth to tell, was a monster among men. He was getting on in years, and suffering from some chest trouble, but he was terrifying to look upon. Though bent and round-shouldered, he was as tall as a post and his arms hung down to the ground like great pincers. He'd been mining for twenty-five years, yet the mine had not got the better of him. No one had wrestled with Onisim for a long time and he himself did not seek to do any wrestling; but now they put him forward, and when the best wrestlers came to try their strength, he lumbered out with them. And of course he threw them all, as easily as kittens.

When it came to Marko's turn to wrestle with him, all the mill-workers yelled:

"Not Onisim! No man can wrestle with a brute like that! He doesn't count."

The miners, for their part, shouted:

"You're frightened, wooden-clogs. Your wrestlers aren't good enough!"

In fact there was quite a row. But here Onisim spoke up:

"Come out and wrestle, Markushko. I want to see how strong you are!"

"All right, Uncle Onisim, let's try," said Marko. "I wouldn't have come out against you if you hadn't wanted it."

So out Marko came. You know the way we wrestle. You press on your opponent's spine until his back cracks and his legs give way. It needs great skill, look you. Marko seemed much smaller than Onisim; yet it was he who won. What a fellow he was, that Marko! Only once did Onisim throw him and he himself threw Onisim twice. Youth will tell. What can an old man do against a young-one?

The mill workers were delighted, of course, but the men from the mine shouted:

"They didn't keep to the rules. Make them wrestle again!" And they shouted and yelled until there was very nearly a fight.

But Onisim himself put a stop to the row.

"Why all this rumpus?" he shouted, "We wrestled according to the rules. Marko didn't foul. In future I shan't wrestle any more. I've tried and that's enough. I'm no longer young enough for these sports."

And there the matter ended. Marko was acclaimed victor again. Prizes were distributed to the best wrestlers, a belt to one, a cap to another, and Marko and Onisim were given a caftan apiece.

After that they all went off to the pub, of course, and took Marko

along with them, though he was an abstemious fellow where liquor was concerned; and very young, too. He would have liked to stay and watch the women and girls doing their round dances and dance and sing with them a bit himself, but having won the wrestling match he couldn't very well refuse to go with the other men. Some respect was due to them. So off he went with them, calling out as he went:

"Tatiana! Don't go away. I'll be back in a minute."

This was addressed to his wife. He had not been married long; they had been together only a year. A cheerful affectionate little thing she was. They used to fondle each other in public, look you, to the envy of the other women.

Before the men reached the pub, Koltovskaya's groom came running up to say that his mistress wished to see Marko. For she—this Koltovskaya woman—had been watching the wrestling bouts from her carriage. The gentry who had come with her from Sisert were also there and the manager and all the factory officials. So Marko had to miss his glass of liquor. He went to the lady's carriage and she handed him a silver rouble.

"Bravo! young man," she said, "I give you this with my own hands!"

Well, Marko knew what it behoved him to do too. He bowed and said:

"My humble thanks to you, Lady. I am happy to be of service." And Koltovskaya sat there and fairly drank him in with her eyes. She had no sense of shame in her that woman, truly she hadn't. Everybody could see.

Only Marko did not understand what she was at and he tried to slip quietly away. But as soon as she saw him making to go, she called out:

"Come closer and show me your hand."

Marko did as she bade him, of course, and stretched out his hand, palm upwards. She laughed and said to him:

"Turn up your sleeves." She ordered him to roll up his sleeves, look you.

Marko did as she ordered and she caught hold of his arm and started pawing it just as if she were examining a horse. The gentlemen came up closer and muttered something to each other in a foreign language. Marko, of course, was vexed at being examined in this way, but he didn't show it and behaved as though it were quite a natural thing. Then the lady told him to unbutton his shirt and bare his chest and shoulders. Marko blushed crimson and was seized with fury, but none the less he did as she bade him. Koltovskaya grabbed his shoulder and patted it and whispered something to the gentlemen which Marko couldn't make out. He only caught a word that sounded like some pet name she was giving him. The women from the mill who were standing near by started whispering to each other and making jokes at Tatiana's expense.

"The lady has chosen your man for one of her stallions. Listen to the new pet name she's already given him."

Tatiana was very young—almost a child, you might say—with little guile in the ways of life. The slightest thing made her cry. And so now she set up a loud wail, as though she were mourning the dead.

"Oi, what are they doing, girls. . . ."

Marko heard somebody crying. He looked round and saw it was Tatiana. And Koltovskaya looked up too and said to the manager:

"Who's that crying?"

The manager told her it was Marko's wife.

"Bring her here," the lady ordered.

They brought Tatiana along and the lady asked her:

"What is the matter with you?"

Tatiana blurted out guilelessly:

"The women say you are going to put Marko into your stable."

Koltovskaya laughed heartily and said:

"What a good idea of theirs! It's quite true: we do need some younger and stronger grooms in our stables. I shall certainly take your man."

Tatiana thought for a bit and then—and she really believed she was giving Koltovskaya good advice—plopped down at her feet and said:

"O please, lady, don't take my Marko away from me. We've not been married a year. And besides he's no good at all with horses."

"I can see he's no good at managing you either. Here you are wagging your tongue in your Mistress's presence. You both need to be taught a lesson," she said and gave an order to the manager:

"Have this girl put to work in my house as kitchen maid. See that she starts work to-morrow morning. Just look what plump cheeks she's got! My Ustinyushka will soon be able to get some of that fat off her. And you, young man, why don't you keep your wife in order?" the lady asked Marko.

Marko, in any case, was beside himself with rage. His face went now scarlet, now white. He was ashamed of the way Koltovskaya had examined his naked body and pawed him about in public, and now here was Tatiana making a laughing stock of him into the bargain. His whole world seemed to have fallen to pieces. He seized Tatiana by the ear and made to go. But Tatiana fell down in a faint, whereupon all the women who were standing by at once started crying:

"Oi, he's killed her! Oi, he's killed her!"

Marko looked down and there in truth lay Tatiana looking as white as death; and her eyes were closed and she did not seem to be breathing. And Koltovskaya upbraided him:

"What sensitiveness, to be sure! You've spoiled her, I can see. Why, she can't even stand up to a blow!"

At this Marko lost all control of himself. He seized her, this Koltovskaya, by the hair and flung her down to the ground so that

her heels went thump against the stone. And he even kicked her in the face.

And now pandemonium broke loose. The gentlemen all rushed at Marko and one of the guards drew his sword.

But Koltovskaya shrieked out:

"Take him alive! Take him alive!"

The gentlemen, of course, had not the strength to take a man like that alive. Some ran off to get the official bullies, others ran to the pub to fetch the men who were there. The bullies came running up and the people rushed towards them with Onisim at their head. Onisim was panting heavily and brandishing a long plank in his hand. A huge plank it was—about three sazhens in length.

"I'll kill anyone who lays a finger on Marko," he shouted.

Well, the gentry saw that things looked black and that they'd have to run for it. But one of them picked up his gun and shot at Onisim. And believe me or not—the dirty dog hit him. Right in the chest the bullet got him; and Onisim just slumped down nose-forwards on to the ground and did not get up again. Lord, what a giant that fellow was! The mine hadn't been able to eat him up, but hit by that tiny little bullet he died instantly.

When the crowd saw that Onisim was dead their fury mounted still higher. They rushed at the man who had fired, but he leaped on to his horse and galloped off down the road to Sisert. The lady and the other gentlemen hurried off the same way and the manager and the mine officials took to their heels as well. As for the bullies—they were given a proper beating up, look you. Two of them had the life beaten out of them and some of the others were maimed. The people had no love for them, those bullies. They were always toadying to the officials, look you, and it was they who used to flog the men in the flogging chamber. That was why they beat them up as they did.

Well, after a day or two, a Court of Enquiry was set up at the works. The officials from the town came and brought soldiers with them. The first thing they did was to try to find Marko Beregovik. The lady herself came rolling up in her carriage. She did all she could, threatened and bribed people to tell her where Marko was. But all to no avail. The people all said the same thing:

"How should we know where he is? He ran away somewhere and took his Tatiana with him."

They tried and tried, but they couldn't find out anything. So finally they gave it up as a bad job.

Of course, they flogged several people, and registered Marko and Tatiana as runaways, and sent out notices everywhere calling on people to seize them, and all this time, look you, Marko was living here in our very grounds. Many of the forest guards knew about it, but they feared to go against the people. They used to warn Marko themselves:

"Look out! they're going to search this place."

And Marko and Tatiana would move to some safer place till the search was over and then go back again. They built themselves a

hut up on the side of the hill, near the spring—a tiny little place, a sort of hayshed.

Three winters Marko lived there. His one desire was to catch Koltovskaya somewhere on the road. But she was wary. After this event she stopped going about in her carriage. When she had to go to town she would have a regular army of people with her. As to going into the forest or skating on the lake as she used to do—not on your life! She must have known Marko was on the watch for her somewhere thereabouts, you see. She used to reproach all her people:

"Unfaithful servants, you are," she'd say, "hiding fugitives in the woods. Where have you hidden Marko Beregovik? Who is feeding him?"

Everyone denied all knowledge of his whereabouts, but there were many who knew.

Finally Marko and Tatiana went away from these parts. 'Twas said they'd had a child—and how could you bring up a child in the forest? It would be no end of trouble. So they went off to Siberia, to the free land there.

People told Koltovskaya they'd done this, but she wouldn't believe them:

"They're trying to lure me into the forest," she said, and she also went away from our works.

That is the hill over there where Marko's hut used to stand, and that is why it is called Marko's Hill.

THE TWISTED ROLL

SO YOU WANT TO HEAR ABOUT MY TWISTED ROLL, DO YOU? ABOUT how I was rich and then squandered my money? Your fathers have talked about it, have they? And you want to have a laugh at the old man's expense. Ekh, you little rogues! But it is true. It really did happen. And it seems such a little time ago, the memory of it has stayed with me like a dream. Yet some things I've forgotten altogether. Many's the washing my memory's had since then; been almost washed out of my mind. Ah well, you can't remember everything!

It started at the time of the Liberation.

The officials at the goldfield tried to keep us in the dark about it. The people in the villages were talking about it, but never a word reached us. The only thing we noticed was that at the works they stopped all leave to go home. No matter how badly you needed to go, there was only one answer: "Impossible". And they stopped employing strangers at the field.

"Whatever can be the reason?" we wondered. Up till now they'd

employed anyone who came along and now no one was wanted. And why were they keeping such a tight hold on us?

The goldfield was in an out of the way spot—at the foot of Vaskina Mountain in the forest. It has been abandoned long ago, 'twas said strange lights used to appear there or marsh gases. I don't know which. By rights there ought to be no strange lights in these parts, but marsh gases are sometimes seen. But that's neither here nor there. . . .

As I said, they closed down the Vaskina gold-field, but in those days it was a very busy place and no end of gold was found there. They drove many people to work in those fields, mainly from our works here. The officials must have thought:

"How can they get to know if we don't let them go home and don't take on anyone from outside. Let them go on working as they did before."

But was it likely the people would remain in ignorance for long? Naturally they found out and made a fuss about it.

"What is this? Everyone free but us!"

The officials found an excuse.

"The proclamation was read out in church," they said, "but where were we to read it? At the liquor-barrel?"

At the goldfield, look you, there wasn't a proper pub, liquor was sold at the Exchequer liquor barrel; the officials took care that the men should not have a kopeck to take home. And at the liquor barrel, look you, there were all sorts of goings on; that was what they were alluding to. They wanted to treat the matter as a joke. But it was not a joke to the people, and they shouted and yelled for all they were worth:

"Read it out now, or else we'll all go to the works and hear it read there."

The officials saw there was no way out of it, so they fished out the bit of paper and read it aloud. But how were the people to understand all the rigmarole of it. They asked questions; they wanted to know what it was all about. They asked about the plough land, about the forests and about the sands too. The officials said there wasn't any plough land to be had in our parts, and as for the forests and sands they were privately owned; they also said we'd have to pay rent on our cottages and gardens.

So they gave out, but nobody believed them.

At the time, I was a man already on in years, but when I heard about the Liberation, I raged worse than anyone:

"They're trying to swindle us," I shouted, "It isn't true what they say. Come with me to Polevsky, lads, and we'll find out the truth. What's the good of listening to these people?"

Others also found their tongues. So then the overseer of the mine—a real eyesore of a man, but honey-tongued—came forward and said:

"Please yourselves, lads. You are free now. You can go where

you will. But don't blame us if we won't take you back again. And another thing: we shall warn our friends not to employ you either. We're free too, you know; we can pick and choose whom we employ. You mustn't blame us for that!"

This sobered some of the men but those who were young and fiery stuck to their own and left the goldfield. And I was one of them. As soon as we got home we asked about the Liberation. And they told us:

"It's like a bald head, this edict of the Tsar's is: it glistens but there's nothing to get hold of."

We could see that this was true—that that was about all it amounted to. But we celebrated a bit all the same. "At the least it will ease our backs a little," we thought, not realizing, of course, that when the belly drives, the back is harder pressed than ever.

Needless to say we drank everything away to the last kopeck, and a man must eat. And what could we do when we had neither goods nor cattle and the only trade we knew was to dig holes in the earth?

Myself had been at it since boyhood. When quite a tiny mite I was sent out to Gumyoshevsky to look for ore. 'Twas an understood thing: soon as a boy was old enough to stand up they sent him to Gumyoshevsky.

"Just the thing for children," said they. "It's as good as a game for them."

So I came in for these games, too. And later they sent me down the mine as well. The mine overseer decided:

"He's getting quite a big boy. Time he pushed a wheelbarrow."

I was lucky to be put under a kind-hearted foreman. I've nothing to say against any of them. They were sorry for us youngsters. As much as they could be in those days, of course. Cuffs and hair-pullings were considered substitutes for gingerbread but none of us were ever flogged. And for that we are grateful to them still.

When I was a little older they handed me pick and spade, hammer and spike and gouges:

"There now," they said, "run away and play!"

And I had my fill of that kind of play. Though I've never seen the Mistress of the Copper Mountain, I've had a whiff and a swallow of her sweet breath. In Gumyoshevsky mine the air was like this now: at first it had a sweet pleasant smell, but once you'd had a gulp or two of it, you could scarcely breathe. 'Twas as though you'd swallowed sulphur fumes. There was a lot of sulphur in the mine then, look you.

What with the bad air and these playthings of mine, I became quite ill. So my late father tried to persuade the mine official:

"Put my boy to some easier work," said he, "he's very ill; if you aren't careful, he'll die. And he's not twenty-three yet."

So after that they began to send me about the mines and goldfields. Here, look you, life is more free and easy. If you're drenched by the

rain, the sun will dry you; and if there's no sun, well there's no great harm done either.

In our parts as you know, ore is found in the open on the surface. It is pleasanter for a man to work like that. Only I wasn't allowed to do it often. Mostly, they made me go underground. That, look you, must have been my lot.

"You're used to it," they said to me. "You went down that deep mine at Gumyoshevsky and what's this compared to it! Just the job for you."

So all my life I burrowed in the earth like a mole. I came to master this job but that was all my knowledge. And I thought: "There is nowhere I can go now except into the earth."

I didn't want to eat humble pie before the overseer and be sent back where I was before, and I was determined not to be sent to the copper mines. From childhood I'd had my fill of play there and I'd seen others get out of the mine as fast as they could. They'd go almost anywhere rather than down the copper-mine. That's the sort of sweet place it was. No one would work there of his own free will. Of course, profits on the mine fell at once. They tried to get more men by offering higher wages, but the men wouldn't even look at them.

About that time I happened to fall in with a Kosobrodsky man, Maximko Zyuzev by name. He was not what you'd call a friend exactly, just an acquaintance. At one time we'd worked in the same place. He was also a man some way on in years and his hair was turning grey.

We talked about this and that, and then he said:

"How would it be now if you and I started prospecting for ourselves? Why should we fill the Exchequer coffers? And who knows, we might make our fortunes? The tools are simple enough. We won't overwork ourselves, so where's the harm in it? Let's try our luck!"

I knew why he'd come to me with this proposition. 'Twas said that since I'd spent my life digging in the earth, I must know where things are hidden; that was why he wanted me to join up with him. I thought it over for a while and then I said:

"All right then, let's try our luck in some spot."

I picked a site, and we put in an application to the office and started digging a hole. 'Twas the right kind of sand we'd chanced on and we might have got along, for all that the office gave us so niggardly a price for the gold. But Zyuzev was never satisfied. He was one of the get-rich-quick kind. Point out a likely site to him and he'd expect to make his fortune overnight.

At the beginning I tried to reason with him:

"This is a good spot we've picked, but we mustn't sell all the gold to the office; we must sell some of it to traders; then we shall be all right."

But Zyuzev wouldn't hear of this—he was scared. And then he

was so set on some kind of silver deer. He was always asking me if I'd seen it. 'Twas supposed to roam about quite near; people had seen it. You had to dig where it had passed. More than once I said to him:

"How could there be a deer in these parts? There are only goats and moose round here."

But Maximko didn't believe me; he thought I knew but wouldn't tell him. But in fact I thought the deer a lot of nonsense. Snakes now, I had a little faith in, and in hoar-frost too. I used to keep a look-out for snake's nests and places hoar-frost wouldn't stay on. There were such places; but in deer I had no faith at all.

And in the end we fell out about this. Maximko shouted that he was right. I stuck to my own. We quarrelled outright and Maximko reproached me:

"And you living on me as you are."

Naturally I wouldn't stand this:

"How so," I said, "when I'm digging here from morn till night?"

So he started reckoning up what he had earned and all on a crooked measure, halving the sums we'd received from the office and doubling what he'd given me. At last I couldn't stand it any longer, and I spat in disgust:

"All right, stop here yourself, you money-grubber!"

And I picked up my spade and left him, he shouting after me:

"I'll not stay an hour. Who wants to work an empty site?"

So I said:

"Well, if that is so, I shall stay here myself."

Maximko just laughed at me:

"And what will you live on? I shall take away all my belongings and you won't find another fool to keep you. I shall tell everyone what a rich place this is to work! You squat in your empty pit and please yourself."

"You wait, you son of a cat!" I thought, "I'll show you!"

I went home, looked up some of my friends, got hold of this and that, and said to my wife:

"Get ready to come with me to the goldfield. You can help me sift the sand."

My present old woman is different; 'twas to have a housekeeper I married her, but in those days I had a real wife. We married when we were young and we'd been through the mill together. A lovely girl she was and knew a lot about prospecting.

"All right," she answered.

When we reached the pit, we found that Maximko had left it bare. There had been a stake, look you, which I had cut with my own hands, but he'd even dragged that away too. It amazed me to see how spiteful such a little man could be.

Well, we got things straight again little by little and started panning. We washed the sand and found it promising. Maximko, look you, had told everyone the site was useless. He had gone off after that deer

of his. Nobody else came near, and my wife and I were left to work the site alone. That just suited us. And on account of this Maximko, too, I left off going to the pub; never set foot in it. Not that it was easy for me; indeed it seemed I couldn't hold out for a single day, yet I did. And in the meantime I found a new place to dispose of my gold.

With the vultures, look you, and the hawks of this secret trade, 'twas risky to deal. They knew all about gold, and a man had only to bring them something worth while and they would try to grab his site for themselves or start working the ground all round him so as to squeeze him out.

So I found a new dealer. He was a very greedy man but had not yet become a power. He owned a pub, of which his father-in-law was in charge—and attached to his house was a barn where he sold meat and sundry small articles; he also frequented the fairs. In a word, he would have seized the whole world had his arms been long enough!

To this dealer I began to take my gold. He could distinguish gold from some poor alloy, but of real quality he was no judge at all. For that you need experience and a different eye altogether. You need an inner eye to see inside the metal, but this merchant had a surface eye that could only see all round it. How could a man like that judge the quality of gold? And on top of that he was frightened.

"Vasily," he said to me, "don't tell anyone you sell me gold! I am not used to the business. It smells too much of Siberia."

What his profits smelt like he didn't say, but it couldn't have been a bad smell. It whetted his appetite. He never refused to buy and he didn't squeeze you too much over the price; nor did he swindle you over the reckoning. All this suited me very well and I took to selling him little bits at a time. In this way my wife and I might have become respected citizens, and lived our lives no worse than other folk, had not that twisted roll turned up.

I can remember it as if it happened to-day. 'Twas on the eve of Holyrood day. My wife called down to me in the pit:

"'Tis time you stopped, Vasily. There's a holiday to-morrow, you know. We must get ready for it. Let's go home now."

The sand I was working at was as hard as stone. I was very tired and I thought to myself: "She's right; I've done enough for to-day." I gave my pick a last hefty swing and this time it caught, as if behind a stone. I tried to shake it out but it wouldn't come. I summoned up all my strength and pulled it towards me and something jumped out and hit my right leg so hard it nearly made me cry out with pain.

When the pain had died down a little, I was curious to see what sort of stone it was. I picked it up and—Mother of mine! It was Gold! It was shaped like one of those twisted rolls we have on holidays, but was much heavier. The top of it was coiled, but the bottom was smooth except for a lot of little knobs on it that looked as if they'd been polished by hand. "How did it get here?" I thought.

I forgot about my leg and shouted: "Help me up, Marinsha!" She

helped me up at once and there was I, acting like a fool. I laughed and flung my arms around her—my wife that is.

"Whatever is the matter, Alexeich?" she asked. So I showed her the stone:

"Look!" I said.

"Well, what of it? I can see. It's just some sort of stone."

"Here, take it!"

Thinking it was just an ordinary stone, she took no particular care with it and it fairly weighed down her hand as I gave it to her. She turned white, my Marinushka did, and for all that we were in the middle of the forest, she asked me in a whisper:

"Is it really gold?"

"Yes," I said.

We didn't stop to wash the sand, but went speedily home.

And strange to tell, as we hastened along the road we kept looking behind us, as if we'd stolen something.

When we got home, I hid the twisted roll and said to my wife:

"Mind you don't say a word to anyone about this!"

And she, for her part, exhorted me:

"Don't go anywhere near a pub until you've sold the gold."

To offer a nugget like this to the office was out of the question. They'd take it away from you. And they'd take away your site—that goes without saying. So when twilight came I went off to that trader of mine, under pretence of buying some meat for the holiday. I found a favourable moment and whispered: "I have business for you."

"Just wait a little," he said. "I'll soon be closing the store."

So that was all right. The last customer went out and the trader locked the doors and said:

"Well, let's see what you've brought."

It was not the first time he'd bought my gold in the barn. He hadn't got any proper scales, look you; but he kept bottles of acid and aqua regia on the counter openly, as if for sale. 'Twas simple in those days—anybody could buy the stuff.

I said to him:

"Lock the outer door too."

"You are worrying quite needlessly," said he. "None of my own people would come here. They are not allowed to."

But I insisted:

"Lock it all the same."

At this he became alarmed.

"Does anybody know why you come to me? Are you quite sure you haven't told anyone?"

"You needn't worry about that," I said. "Nobody has a notion why I come to you. But this time I've got a lot."

"There's no harm in a lot," he said, "so long as it's not a little. I'll buy as much as you like."

He locked the outer door all the same.

"Well, let's see it," he said.

I picked up the chopper from the meat block in case of need and handed him the twisted roll, wrapped in a rag.

"Here, weigh that up," I said.

Being a trader he could tell by the feel of it in his hand that it was heavy.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Weigh it," I answered.

He dropped it on to the ordinary scales, weighed it carefully and said:

"Just over eighteen pounds."

"There you are then. Take it!"

"Take what? Where have you got it?"

"In that rag."

"Eighteen pounds?"

"You weighed it yourself. If you haven't money enough, I'll take it to the office."

That about the office was only a piece of artfulness. Why should I take it to the office?

The trader unwrapped the rag, tested the nugget with acid and aqua regia. Well, it was gold right enough. He was all of a sweat with excitement. The sweat poured down his nose, but he didn't say anything; just stared at me. Finally he said:

"But it may be only the surface that's gold."

That was all he knew about it, look you! The fool, to think the inside of a gold nugget could be iron!

I explained to him that the knobs on the bottom were like the hall-mark of the nugget, but I could see he didn't believe me. And he found an excuse:

"I couldn't buy it all," he said. "I haven't enough money here. You must cut it up. No need to take it to the office."

So he persuaded me to cut the nugget up. I didn't like to, but I could see there was nothing else to be done. So I took the nugget and chopped off the edges there and then on the meat block.

The trader tested it again and after that he was at last convinced and ran to the house to fetch some money. He came back with a casket, but he was trembling all over. He was plainly frightened, but greed had got the better of his fear. It meant a nice nest-egg for him also! I don't remember what rate the office was paying then, but he gave me a rouble a pound more.

The trader weighed the heart of the nugget and the bits I'd chopped off separately. He emptied the money from the casket and took a wad of larger notes out of his bosom. And the till was there, just handy. . . . He had enough to pay for the end pieces but he wanted to buy the middle piece. It was heavier than the rest.

"Let me owe you the amount," he said. "I'll pay you to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow at the latest."

I, of course, told him that one could not run up debts in deals of this kind. So then he said:

"Come across to my house and sit down for a little. I'll go into the pub and see what we've got in the till there." And he pushed the heap of money over to me.

I counted it and saw that only a mere trifle was still owing and I could wait for it. So I did what I had seen that he did: put the larger notes in my bosom, the smaller sums in my pocket and what remained of the gold I hid in my boots. I went with the trader into his house and there I saw that supper had been laid out, and his wife was bustling about and making a great fuss. The trader went off to the pub, and his wife came up to me and said:

"Have something to eat, dear guest. Please forgive our humble fare. I wasn't expecting a guest, so this is all I can offer you."

Humble fare indeed! And the table was crammed with food and drink! But I was strong-minded and said I wouldn't drink anything.

"I can't because I've got money with me," I said.

But she coaxed me and urged me and said:

"Come, just a little of the red, won't you?" and handed me a glass. It was quite a small glass—about half the size of a tea-glass.

"I'll have one too," she said, and poured one out for herself.

"What harm can just one do?" I thought. "And I mustn't let a woman think my head's not strong enough." So I took the glass and drank.

Lord, what liquor it was! Never in my life had I tasted anything like it. It was thick and strong and the smell of it!—I could have gone on sniffing it for ever. Later I learned it was called rum.

Just suited to my taste it was, and before I knew it this woman, the trader's wife, had poured me out a second glass. I drank that too and what followed you can imagine. Glass flew after glass like little birds.

Still, I managed to get away from the trader's house and brought the money and the rest of the gold safely home. In place of what he owed me, the money he'd gone to fetch from the pub, he brought a bag of presents: food of all kinds; naturally, a shawl for my wife and the like. And there and then he put in five or six bottles of this rum. His wife coaxed him to do so, saying:

"He's taken a fancy to it, don't grudge it him, Platosha. Let him have the rest of the bottles. You can easily get some more when you go to town."

The trader was only too pleased to oblige:

"But I . . . give it to him? Only too pleased. Let him drink a glass for his health and treat his wife too. She'll never have tasted liquor like this. Don't forget to treat her. I'll bring you some more. Not for money; just as a gift. I'm only too pleased to be of service to a friend. Mind you treat your wife now; don't stint her."

When I got home, I showed Marina the packet of money, buried

the rest of the gold, and set to treating her. At first she refused the liquor, said it was too strong; then she began to praise its beautiful smell!

We got drunk and started making a lot of noise, of course, sang and danced and so forth. Various acquaintances of ours dropped in. They noticed we'd made a lucky strike and wished us well.

"Congratulations on your lucky find!" they said.

Well, we ate and drank all that was in the house and then went off to the pub. And the trader sent his father-in-law over to the barn —and served in the bar himself, egging me on. Friends sprang up on all sides; so many of them you couldn't move! And so the wheel rolled on along the smooth road. Women started running after me and of course, this didn't please Marinushka. . . . so she took to drinking rum in earnest. The trader humoured her and encouraged her until she would drink just anything she could get. I was left to do all the work with my own two hands and the trader cheated us and cheated us.

Sometimes we would come to our senses and say to ourselves:

"Well, at any rate we've got the ends of the nugget."

But those, jagged as they were, slid into the trader's pockets as if they'd been greased. We were plucked clean.

That was bad enough, but worse was to come. My Marinushka sickened and fell ill. 'Twas the kind of life we'd been leading did it. She pined for a while and then passed away. I buried her and sadly grieved for her and then went back to the goldfield. Where else could I go?

On the site where we'd found that hand-baked twisted roll, was Maximko Zyuzev, back again with all his family. The site, look you, had been registered in his name, so he'd gone back there. Evidently he'd given up chasing his deer! He'd grown rich—goodness, how rich!—he wore a ribbon in his hat and welts to his boots. And he'd built houses for his sons in Kosoy Brod. With brass plates on the gates, to show they were his and no one else's. In a word, he'd made his fortune.

I stared and stared and then went off to Besshtanka. I'd had my eye on a site there, too. Many wanted to go into partnership with me; I could hardly get rid of them. They hoped I might find another twisted roll—or better still, a whole loaf!

But no more twisted rolls were baked for me. I found a little gold. Enough for myself and a few others. But to pick up such a piece of folly—that never happened to me again.

And maybe it was just as well. Anyway I can end my days on Copper Mountain, keeping an eye on people, for where else could I have dragged them out? What, after all, is the luck of a prospector? A man first of all will bloat himself with drink and then give up the ghost.

That's the way of it. My wife and I thought we had made our fortune, but it only brought her misery. It deceives people. But it

has taught me a lesson. An excellent lesson. Now I know where our fortune has gone.

Those houses yonder and those shops of stone belonging to the Profitevskis were built on mine and Marina's fortune. She knew the right moment to fill up my glass, did that Profitevskaya, the snake!

People still tease me about that glass. But what do I care? 'Twas folly, of course it was, but all the same I drank away my money. I did not steal it. It was my own, not someone else's.

Now, it's those traders you should ask as to how they came to rob me, a drunken man, and to drive my wife to the grave. They will be asked in time, and in what a fashion too! And when that day comes, look you, that twisted roll of mine and Marina's will be added to the reckoning.

Well, I see you didn't find my story funny. I would have told you a more cheerful one, but there's been little that's cheerful in my life.

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